

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1926

VOL. LXXXVII

NUMBER 3

TO OUR READERS—Since Mr. Munsey's death we have received so many inquiries for the books of which he was the author, all of which have been out of print for many years, that in the present number of the magazine we reprint, complete, this short novel, which was written in the early part of 1892. We feel sure that our readers will be greatly interested in the story, not only on account of its authorship, but because it is a convincing picture of a phase of American society thirty-five years ago.

On the Field of Honor

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—A STORY OF NEW YORK SOCIETY
IN THE EARLY NINETIES, WHEN SOME OF THE GREAT
FORTUNES OF TO-DAY WERE IN THE MAKING

By Frank A. Munsey

Author of "Derringforth," "A Tragedy of Errors," etc.

"DO you believe in fatalism, Vernon?"
"Not to any great extent."
"I wonder if there is anything in the idea!"

"Maybe," replied Harley Vernon, relighting his cigar. "Yes, maybe; but what has put this thought into your head to-night, Merwyn—you of all men?"

"It is a trivial matter."

Tom Merwyn sipped his coffee in a thoughtful mood quite foreign to his usually careless manner, Vernon meanwhile sending up a ring of smoke that circled around as it rose until it was lost in the air far up toward the ceiling. He watched this, and, watching, waited for Merwyn to speak fur-

ther. Presently Merwyn replaced his cigar in his mouth and continued:

"Yes, just a series of incidents—that's all; but somehow they impressed me strangely. It was something like a week ago that I got on a Broadway car at Twenty-Third Street to go uptown. There happened to be a vacant seat, and I took it, but I had not occupied it many minutes when a young woman, rather handsome, and rather flashily dressed, entered the car. She was accompanied by a man older than herself—thirty-five, perhaps. I rose and offered her my seat, which she accepted, thanking me politely. I raised my hat, expecting a similar act on the part of the

man who came in with her, but he gave no recognition of my courtesy.

"'I thought he was her escort,' I said mentally, 'but I was doubtless mistaken,' and with this observation I dismissed him from my mind.

"The car rolled on, and my thoughts rolled on likewise, speeding a thousand times faster, I fancy, than the slow wheels beneath my feet; but presently my attention was again drawn to this man by his paying the fare of the woman who entered the car with him. Beyond this nothing had occurred to indicate that he was her escort. He stood not far from her, his right hand resting in one of the straps provided for the less fortunate passengers. I looked at him more critically now, but I had hardly begun the study of his face when a seat beside his companion was vacated, and he coolly took it, without apparent consideration for me, to whom he was indebted for her comfort.

"'It is fortunate the world is not made up of such as he,' I said to myself, indignant at the selfishness of the man.

"They both left the car at Forty-Ninth, where I put on my riding suit and went for a spin in the park."

"Simply one of the ill-bred fellows one meets constantly on the elevated and surface roads," remarked Vernon, with a gesture suggesting that it was indeed a very trivial incident.

"Of course I constantly meet ill-bred fellows who do as this man did, but they are usually of the coarser sort. This man looked and was dressed like a gentleman."

"Perhaps he had a motive in wishing to avoid the appearance of being the woman's escort."

"Possibly," returned Merwyn, turning this theory over in his mind.

"Was she the sort of a woman with whom you would be glad to have your friends see you in a public conveyance?"

"Well, hardly."

"That solves the problem, then — and not so much of a problem, either," replied Vernon, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I told you that it was a trivial matter."

"Yes, Tom, so you did—another evidence of your truthfulness;" and Vernon smiled cynically.

Merwyn's cheeks reddened, but he hoped that Vernon had not noted this. He knocked the ashes from his cigar, and gave it a few vigorous puffs, making it glow.

Then he removed it from his mouth, and watched the red embers fade and blacken, meanwhile debating with himself whether he should proceed with the story that he had started to tell. He finally resumed, saying:

"You are hardly sympathetic enough to appreciate this feeling, Harley. You are so cynical!"

"But, my dear boy," interrupted Vernon, "I thought from your serious manner that you had something really interesting to tell me—something so weird that it would make my blood dance."

"No, it is not worth the telling in that sense — just little occurrences — coincidences, if you please, but infernally odd, if merely coincidences."

"Go on, and let me judge for myself."

"After my ride in the park I dined at Delmonico's with Bishop—you know him, the man who put through the telephone deal. I invited him to go with me to see 'The Hub' at the Madison Square. We went to the box office as soon as we had finished dinner, to get tickets. There was one man at the window as I approached.

"'I will take them,' I heard him say, and the ticket agent passed out some tickets.

"The man took them up, together with his change, and as he turned to pass from behind the rail I saw that he was the same fellow for whom I had conceived a sudden feeling of repugnance in the afternoon. It was a coincidence, I thought, but I began to feel unreasonably annoyed at the fellow when, on my asking for two orchestra chairs, the ticket seller replied that he had just sold the last two seats to the man who had preceded me."

"This is twice you ran against him in one day, then," remarked Vernon, with growing interest.

"Yes, twice, and on the next day but one I ran against him again, as you put it. It happened in this way. I took an early morning train, leaving Jersey City somewhere about five o'clock, for Rocky Heights, a little settlement up in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. The nearest railroad station to Rocky Heights is Dalebury, on the Lehigh Valley road. Dalebury is one of those stations where a train stops whenever a passenger happens to wish to get off, and this occurs rarely, I judge. I was one of these unfortunates, however, having been ordered to Rocky Heights by

the chief, to write up the kidnaping of the Drummond child."

"So that was your report in the *Metropolis*! Devilish clever work, my boy," said Vernon, tossing off his *crème de menthe*. "Yes, as good work as you have ever done."

"I'm glad you like it. The chief was rather pleased with it, too, I understand. To resume—I rode in the rear car, and from the fact that I was asleep until awakened by the conductor, I was not the first man to leave the train at Dalebury. I stopped to ask a loungee at the station how far it was to Rocky Heights. He informed me that it was four miles and a half, and that no regular stage ran there."

"'But a man,' said he, 'who sometimes takes folks into the country in his wagon is on the other side of the depot now. Most likely you can get him to take you to the Heights.'"

"I thanked him, and started for the man with the wagon. I found him—found that he had just started—was three rods away, perhaps, and a man sat beside him. I called to him to stop. He stopped. I asked him if he could take me to Rocky Heights."

"'No,' said he, 'I have to take this gentleman to Roslyn Point.'"

"The passenger looked sharply around, frowning at what he evidently regarded as my presumption. It was the man I had met in the Broadway car."

"This is indeed growing interesting," said Vernon.

"But that was not the last time I ran up against him," replied Merwyn.

"Not your last!" exclaimed Vernon, now beginning to feel that there was something weird in the situation.

"Yes, we ran up against each other last night—you see, I hold to your way of expressing it."

"The expression seems to fit the case."

"Perfectly; and each time, so far, I have had to bear the brunt of the collision. Last night was no exception. Merely another coincidence, I suppose; but of that you may judge for yourself. You know the Van Zants of Thirty-Seventh Street? I met Miss Van Zant last fall at Lenox, and became rather well acquainted with her. She invited me to call when she returned to the city, and I said I would do so, but never made good my promise until last night. I had previously written to her,

saying that if she would name an evening when she would be at home, and free from engagements, I would be most happy to call. Last evening was fixed upon, and I presented myself at a reasonably early hour. Miss Van Zant was quite alone, as I had expected to find her. She looked very pretty, tastefully gowned in a becoming evening dress of light pink silk. Half an hour went by—only half an hour, but a delightful, intoxicating half hour—when the doorbell rang. Did you ever hear a doorbell give out an audacious, impudent, nerve-grating sound, Harley? If you have, you can imagine how that bell sounded to me. I would have taken my oath that the Broadway car fellow had pursued me, even to that drawing-room. I knew it was he. Nobody else could ring a bell as he had rung that one—an uncanny ring that made my blood freeze."

"The butler handed Miss Van Zant a card, and an instant later the man whose name it bore entered our presence. I groaned almost audibly, I fear. He advanced to Miss Van Zant, and, taking her hand, raised it high in the air, and at that altitude shook it in the most approved fashion of all idiocy. His bow was something profound, and was only equaled by the exuberance of his smile. I was quite overwhelmed for the moment, and actually forgot my dislike for him. My eyes had been fixed on him with the curiosity with which a child watches a circus clown."

"'Mr. Merwyn,' said Miss Van Zant, 'let me present my friend, Mr. Faulkner Ruddington.'"

"I extended my hand as a matter of course, but there was something in his touch that made me recoil from the man. He had the better of me this time, as usual. As my call began first, it had to end first, and I terminated it at once, excusing myself as politely as I could."

II

"Who is this fellow—Merwyn, did you call him?" asked Faulkner Ruddington, when the other visitor had passed from the room.

Margaret Van Zant looked up, surprised at the form of the inquiry; but after an instant's pause she replied:

"Yes, he is Tom Merwyn, a newspaper man."

"Oh!" was the response.

"Have you never met him before?"

"I can't say that I have had the pleasure until to-night."

There was a peculiar emphasis on the word "pleasure" that Miss Van Zant was quick to notice.

"You make me think you know of something against him, Mr. Ruddington," she replied anxiously.

"I judge simply on general principles, and these newspaper men—well, they are not the sort of men that interest me—Bohemians, and all that, you know."

"But I have found Mr. Merwyn delightfully interesting. If he is a Bohemian, he is an awfully jolly one—talks so well, and writes the cleverest things. Besides, he is a Yale man, and a Bones man, too—think of that!"

"A Bones man?" echoed Ruddington, looking very blank, when Miss Van Zant had added her crowning tribute to Merwyn.

"Yes, a Bones man!"

Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, for to her a Yale man was a paragon, but to be a Bones man was to be at the top notch of all top-notchery.

"Ah, indeed, a Bones man, is he?" replied Ruddington, with a silly little laugh, wondering what in the name of his satanic majesty a Bones man could be. "And to think that he should have made nothing better of himself than a newspaper reporter!" he added, with precipitate haste to get away from so dangerous a topic.

"Yes, I think myself he ought to have gone into law, but I don't know—perhaps he will do better in journalism. A lot of college fellows are on New York papers now, and just think how the President has appointed newspaper men to places of honor—foreign missions and the like."

Ruddington felt that this topic, too, was taking a dangerous turn, for he had not wasted his time in keeping informed as to who represented this government in Paris or at any other foreign post.

"Well, I dare say I am prejudiced," he went on, feeling his way to safer ground. "Yes, perhaps I am; but then a man has his own way of looking at things. I like to see a man have ideas of his own, you know. I have mine, and I always say what I think. Perhaps I should have made an exception in the case of this fellow Merwyn. You see I didn't know he was a Bones man. Of course that makes a difference—all the difference in the world; but then, you know, I am pretty careful

about my associates, anyway—never take up with a fellow unless I know something about him—what his family is, his position, and so forth. I tell you what it is, a man in my position can't be too careful. Not that I am afraid of losing caste; but then, you see, it saves a deuce of a lot of trouble, and one of my mottoes is to get along without friction. A man lives so much longer, don't you know, and keeps his youth, too. Of course, now I know that Merwyn is a Bones man, I shall think differently of him; but even now, if I were to ask myself what his family is, I couldn't say—you couldn't say—and I don't know any Merwyns in my set."

"No, he is not in your set, Mr. Ruddington," replied Miss Van Zant. "He is a busy man."

Ruddington looked up quickly, but the girl had dropped her eyes. He felt, though, that there was satire in her remark, and accordingly tacked with much haste; but he did not get on to his satisfaction, and very soon he bade Miss Van Zant good night.

"Curse that fellow Merwyn!" he muttered, on reaching the sidewalk. "He spoiled the evening for me, and spoiled my chances with that girl, too. I made an ass of myself—that is what I did. I knew I was making an ass of myself all the time, but I couldn't help it. She was making fun of me, and I felt it all the time—talking about Bones men and all that rot, just purposely to place me at a disadvantage, and all on account of that cursed Merwyn—a miserable reporter at best! The idea, and a girl in her position!"

Ruddington turned down Fifth Avenue, and in a little time reached his room—a small, cheerless apartment in the fourth story of a house about midway between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

"I don't know what I came here for," he snarled out spitefully, having thrown himself into a chair with hat and topcoat on. "This is a miserable life," he broke out after another pause, shivering from the cold, for his room was without heat. "A miserable life, and a miserable way to live it! I'm sick and tired of the whole thing—this mean attic room and only half a valet—a nice way for a gentleman to live!—yes, only half a valet—too poor to have a whole one to myself. A dozen times," he continued, sighing now and again, shivering more frequently—"yes, a dozen times I

have almost won, but some cursed thing has happened every time to make the girl change her mind, just as I am sure it has happened again to-night. I never had any luck, anyway. I wish I had never gone into this gentleman business! It's just smile and smirk and be polite, and say sweet things and wait on people, when I feel like smashing things—like blowing up the whole business—this cold, cheerless starvation—this rank sham, putting-on-airs sort of a life. No, I never did have any luck, as other fellows have it. There is Jack Riddles." Ruddington turned up his nose. "Yes, he has as good as bagged the game, and what is there to Jack Riddles, anyway? He is poorer than I am, if anything—shares my valet with me—not more than eighteen hundred a year, and I have two thousand lacking a hundred or so; but he has been accepted, and she is very rich, they say. Won't Jack Riddles swell when he gets hold of her money? No more half valet business for him! But who will take his half of my valet?—and I can't get along without one. Get along without a valet!" He repeated the words with a shudder. "Oh, me without a valet!"

Ruddington buried his head in his hands, and thought and thought. The clock ticked steadily on, and he seemed to shrivel, to shrink within himself, as he drew his coat more tightly about him.

"Yes, Jack Riddles has won this time," he repeated to himself softly, "and she is very rich. Jack will be very rich, and I—well, I am to be his best man!"

On the following morning, Ruddington was in better spirits. At the usual hour—eleven o'clock—he breakfasted at Delmonico's with the prospective bridegroom.

"I shall miss you, Jack," he said, helping Riddles to a portion of oatmeal. "I don't quite know how I shall manage it when you have gone off."

"I shall miss you, too, old man," answered Riddles absent-mindedly. "Yes, miss you," he continued after a pause, with a far-away look in his eyes. "Of course I shall; but then you will be going off yourself soon, I suppose."

Ruddington shook his head dubiously.

"I hope that the Van Zant claim is panning out to your satisfaction?"

"No, Jack, it's not panning out at all satisfactorily."

"I'm sorry, old man, indeed I am," an-

swered Riddles. "She's a stunning girl, and as for money—well, you couldn't ask for anything better."

"Oh, that part is all right, but—well, you know, I think she is interested in somebody else—a newspaper man."

"A newspaper man!" exclaimed Riddles, contemptuously.

"Yes, and only a reporter at that—on the *Metropolis*."

"Well, if that's the sort of girl she is, you are in luck, old man—yes, positively in luck. Why, you can't afford to throw yourself away, don't you know, on any such girl! I wouldn't have done it myself, not even when things went hardest with me, but—not so much, old man, not so much! You will rob yourself," exclaimed Riddles, the remark being brought out by Ruddington's generous division of a diminutive shad roe.

"Oh, not at all! Abundance here, and, besides, you know I am a light eater," replied Ruddington, serving himself with the remaining portion.

At this juncture the valet, supported jointly by the two men, arrived in all the professional glory of his vocation. It was a phase of their lives to receive letters while breakfasting at Delmonico's, and it was one of the valet's duties to bring their mail at a certain time each morning. If there were no genuine communications, then the deficiency had to be supplied by means of homemade substitutes. Letters of some sort Riddles and Ruddington must have. The receipt of their mail was as much a part of their breakfast as the cigarettes, a course that could by no means be dispensed with.

The letters were read, the valet dispatched on missions, actual or bogus, the coffee drunk, the cigarettes smoked, and breakfast was over for these two; but they lingered at the table and talked. This morning they lingered longer than was their custom, to discuss the great event ahead—great for Jack Riddles, in that it would lift him from poverty to a position of wealth; great for Faulkner Ruddington, in a way, for to be best man at so notable a social event was a triumph that filled his little soul with vain pride. But it meant more to Ruddington than this—more than anything in his whole previous life, for it was at the marriage rehearsal that he met Eleanor Clayson.

Ruddington had met thousands of girls

before. It had been his life work to meet girls and to pay court to them. He had met handsomer girls than Eleanor, more dashing girls, girls who talked better, and girls better trained in social arts; but never had he met one who impressed him as she did.

"Mabel is my dearest, dearest friend," said Eleanor, as Ruddington walked with her up the aisle toward the altar, where the bridal party was assembling.

"And Jack Riddles is my dearest friend," returned Ruddington, exerting himself to be particularly fascinating; "so you see we shall each suffer a loss by this marriage."

"Isn't it mean?—and to think that Mabel and I have been just inseparable!"

"Yes, I think it is mean myself. I really don't know what I shall do without Jack. We occupied adjoining apartments, took our meals together, and all that, you know."

Ruddington omitted to mention the co-partnership arrangements for the services of their valet.

"I'm so sorry for you, Mr. Ruddington! You will be very lonely, I am sure;" and Eleanor turned her sweet face toward his with a pretty look of sympathy that made his heart beat faster.

"Yes, awfully lonely without Jack, dear fellow; but there is one compensation in giving him up," said Ruddington, inclining his head toward hers and speaking softly and confidentially. "Yes, one—and can you guess what that is, I wonder?"

"I really can't imagine. You see, I have known you for such a little time."

"But if you were to try very hard I'm sure you could guess."

"No, I'm afraid I couldn't if I were to try ever so hard—unless, unless you, too, are going to get married, Mr. Ruddington?"

"Oh, no, indeed, nothing of that sort! It has something to do with you."

"With me!" replied Eleanor, and the color in her cheeks brightened, making her prettier and sweeter than before.

"Yes, with you. My meeting you is the compensation;" and Ruddington glowed with an expression designed to impress her with the depth of his admiration.

"Oh, Mr. Ruddington, you are much too complimentary!"

"No, Miss Clayson, I couldn't be too complimentary to you," said Ruddington, speaking seriously, impressively.

"This is very delightful to hear, but I

am sure you are flattering me," protested Eleanor, pleased, nevertheless.

Eleanor Clayson was very young. She had not yet seen enough of society men to understand them fully—to know how little sweet words from their lips meant. She had been little in society. Her home was in the country, in the northern part of New York State, where social matters were not the chief consideration of life, even in a family so wealthy as hers. Raymond T. Clayson, her father, had some hard-headed, common sense ideas of life, which he had inherited, together with a considerable property, from his father, a sterling veteran of the old school. Mr. Clayson was one of the pioneers in the manufacturing of printing paper from wood pulp. Having abundant means at his command, and withal being a bold, aggressive man of sound business judgment, he had amassed a great fortune, which some day, in the natural course of things, would fall to Eleanor, his only child.

"My only hope of keeping this property in the family is that Eleanor will marry a man who can fill my place," he said to himself, as he walked one day along the river front and proudly surveyed his long line of pulp and paper mills, the creation of his own genius and enterprise. "Yes, it all rests with Eleanor, now, and she is an attractive girl and a good girl. She ought to do well, ought Eleanor, and I'll do well by her husband, if he is a man—yes, if he is a man!"

The old gentleman's face darkened, and he turned away, troubled. As he walked on toward his counting room, he continued:

"I hope he will be a man! It would break my heart to see this property go out of the family;" and he turned once more for another proud glance at his possessions, the chief industry of the town, of which he was the leading citizen.

Eleanor Clayson and Mabel Tolman had passed three years together at Forrestville, on the Hudson. They entered the school there at the same time, and at once became fast friends. Together they worked through the hours of study; together they passed the hours of play, growing fonder and fonder of each other as the weeks and months and years rolled by.

They had graduated nine months before, each declaring that she could not live without the other. It was hard to turn their

backs on the old school, where they had been so happy, knowing that it would never again be their home—that their room and their places were to be taken by others, in whom they felt no interest—whom they did not even know. It was harder yet to bid good-by to the teachers, some of whom they loved dearly. It was no less painful to say farewell to their school companions, many of whom they might never see again—charming girls now grown to womanhood, whose homes were scattered from the East all the way to the Far West.

All this was hard, indeed, but hardest of all to Eleanor and Mabel was their own separation. Each went home with a heavy heart. The light had gone out of the world, and a greater sorrow than the two girls had ever known was upon them; but they promised to be with each other in a few weeks, when they would spend the summer together. Then life would begin again, and they would live over the happy days of the past. It was this thought that enabled them to bear the pain of separation, so great was their love for each other.

The weeks came and went, and the summer was gone, and Mabel and Eleanor had not seen each other. The fall was well advanced now, and still they had not met. Mabel was in Europe, whither she had gone with her parents. She loved Eleanor still, but her love was as the love of a betrothed widow for a dead husband.

Mabel was engaged.

Jack Riddles had sailed for Europe on the same steamer with the Tolmans. Mabel was stylish and rather pretty. Her father was rich. Riddles met her and devoted himself to her. She still mourned the absence of Eleanor, and was unhappy. Europe had no attractions for her. She wanted, instead, to be with Eleanor in the country, as they had promised each other.

Gradually, however, Riddles interested her. They were much together on the way over—they were much together while there. Riddles was a good-looking fellow, and well trained in all social arts. He wooed to win, and he won. Mabel loved him, and the sorrow of her heart was gone. The world was bright again to her, but in Eleanor's life there was a vacuum not yet filled.

III

ELEANOR CLAYSON was to be Mabel's maid of honor. A week before the day set for the wedding she had come to visit her

friend. It was their first meeting since the separation that had wrung their hearts, when they felt that life without each other's constant presence would be a dreary, cheerless monotony.

Their reunion was something to refresh the soul of a cynic—to kindle anew in his dull heart a blaze of enthusiasm, warming it into sympathy and love. Eleanor was happy again. Mabel was radiantly happy. The old days were gone over, and the story of Mabel's love was rehearsed again and again. The old days interested them less than they had expected. The new love interested them more. Mabel thought of little else.

"Oh, I am so happy, dear!" she had said to Eleanor for the thousandth time, kissing her with consuming love. "I am so happy, and I do love Jack so—dear, sweet Jack!"

Eleanor kissed Mabel, and they cried in each other's arms with joy tears that they could not repress—did not want to repress. Thus the conversation ran, Mabel growing happier and more radiant as the eventful day drew nearer; but Eleanor, now that the first excitement of the reunion was over, became less cheerful, even sad at times.

Her friend's sadness was one that Mabel could not understand, for to her the whole world was bright and gay and sunny. There were no clouds anywhere—no misery, no sadness—nothing but one delirious ecstasy of absorbing love. Eleanor knew nothing of such love as this, and her heart craved something, she knew not what. Mabel's affection had not satisfied her craving, as she had thought it would.

"Perhaps it is because Mabel cares so much for Jack," she reasoned with herself. "She loves me, too, but it doesn't seem the same—not quite the same as the love of the old school days, when we were so happy, Mabel and I."

Eleanor was keenly disappointed, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she hid her sorrow from Mabel. To be so enveloped in the overcharged atmosphere of love as Eleanor was, and to feel that none of it entered her own starving heart—though she did not realize that her heart was starving—was a sensation so depressing, so indefinable, as to crush the girl's spirits and make her wish herself anywhere but there, where her soul was not attuned to the surrounding merriment. The reaction from the joy of her reunion with Mabel had come to Eleanor, and it had driven out,

it seemed to her, all the sweetness of her life. She had never felt the sense of loneliness so keenly as she felt it now—not even at the time of her parting from Mabel at the end of their school life.

It is sometimes a healthful experience to get far down in the valley—down where the foundation beneath one's feet is so deep and so hard that he can sink no lower. The sensation is depressing, to be sure, and even sickening, if he be accustomed to the heights where the air is clear and exhilarating; but gradually he adjusts himself to the new situation, and sooner or later finds a relief in the feeling that he can drop no farther—that any change must tend upward, as he already stands on the very bed rock of life. One of the marvelous things about human nature is the readiness with which it can adapt itself to new conditions. A shadow, a sorrow, then a little light, and presently the curtains of the heart are drawn back and the sun fills all its chambers with gladness and joy.

Eleanor had fallen from the heights to the valley, and deep and sudden was her fall; but it was good for her, for her feet had never touched a foundation like this before. There was no yielding anywhere—nothing but a bare, stern substratum, and she wished that she might die.

Mabel, meanwhile, talked on of love, and looked the love she talked. Eleanor wondered how her friend could be so happy; but soon the theme began to interest her, and after a time it possessed a subtle charm.

"You will think me very silly, dear, talking so much of Jack," said Mabel. "I know you will, but I can't help it—I do love him so!"

"No—oh, no, don't think that, for I do like to have you tell me all about it. It is all so new to me, you know, and so strange."

"It is strange, isn't it? I would never have believed that I could care for a man as I care for Jack."

"I wouldn't have believed it of you, either," answered Eleanor dreamily. "No—you were not a bit this way in the old days."

"But that was before I had met Jack, you know, dear."

Eleanor had not seen Riddles yet, and she tried to picture to herself the sort of man he was. Mabel had talked so much of him that she began to feel a strange in-

terest in him—began to wonder if she could care for him as Mabel cared for him, were anything to happen even now to break off the engagement. The thought made her flush with a guilty feeling. She kissed Mabel endearingly, to assure herself that she was not the selfish creature that her fancy had made her seem; but her thoughts were filled with love, and with the mental picture she had formed of Jack, wondering if there was any other man for whom a girl could care as Mabel cared for him.

It was at this stage that she met Ruddington, Jack's dearest friend, who was to be best man, while she was to be maid of honor. How odd it all seemed to her! What a clever man Mr. Ruddington really was—next to Jack himself the nicest man she had ever met!

When the experimental ceremony was over, it was Ruddington who helped Eleanor with her wraps, it was Ruddington who walked out of the church with her, it was Ruddington who handed her into the carriage and followed her himself. How delightfully he talked on the way home! She was quite sure now that even Jack Riddles could not say such pleasing things—so clever and so much to the point.

The wedding party went to Mabel's home, where they sat down to a prenuptial supper. Ruddington was placed beside Eleanor, and Eleanor was happy. He felt that he had made a good impression already, and his efforts to fascinate her were redoubled. Never did he strive harder to entertain, to amuse, to win, than on that night. His old jokes were new to Eleanor. His manner was interesting, his flattery effective, his arts telling. He talked of the theater, of the opera, of society, and of the latest fads. Eleanor listened, wondered, warmed, and felt that she had never known before how charmingly entertaining a man could be.

It was evident to Mabel Tolman that Ruddington had made an impression, and she was glad. Her own heart was so full of love that she wanted all the world to love and be loved, but especially she desired this for Eleanor.

IV

THE wedding ceremony was over, and Ruddington walked proudly down the aisle with Eleanor, behind the bride and groom. It was the great event in his life. His own self-appreciation, never unduly modest, was

at this instant a consuming flame of admiration. His head was very high, and in his step there were joy and vanity, a lightness of soul, a bubbling of spirits that would furnish a theme for a painter. He caught glances of familiar faces on either side of him—envious faces, it seemed to him, and their envy was his glory.

"How lovely Mabel looked!" whispered Eleanor nervously, when they had reached the vestibule door.

"Yes," he replied, in equally soft tones, inclining his head toward hers. "She would have looked far lovelier, though, but for the contrast with her charming maid of honor."

"Oh, you must not say that!" replied Eleanor, flushing.

"But I must," persisted Ruddington. "You were a dream—a poem!"

"It isn't fair to flatter me in this way, Mr. Ruddington!"

"Indeed it is—it's only justice to you. Everybody admires you—I could see it—you must have seen it. All eyes were on you, and how well you went through with it all!"

Eleanor's heart throbbed with quickened beat.

"Did I—did I really get through all right?" she stammered.

"Superbly," replied Ruddington. "You were grace itself—the most charming maid of honor I have ever seen."

"But I was so frightened, I must have shown it—I know I must!"

"No, indeed, you did not—just enough agitation to add a charm and sweetness that won everybody's heart—won my heart, Miss Clayson."

At the reception Ruddington's time was so taken up by his duties that he saw little of Eleanor; but at supper he was again beside her, and again brought to bear his insidious arts of flattery.

That night Eleanor went home with Grace Hammond, with whom she had promised to spend a couple of weeks. Grace was also a Forrestville girl. Eleanor's heart was very light. She talked in an erratic, ecstatic way to Grace, kissing her hysterically. Ruddington was in her thoughts. Again she saw him at the altar, as he entered with the groom, tall and handsome—saw him walking down the aisle with her, and how proud and aristocratic he looked! Again she felt his warm breath on her cheek, as he bent his head toward

hers to speak soft words intended for her ear only. Again she listened to the compliments he paid her, to his praise of her beauty, to all the sweet nothings he said to her at supper. She recalled his bidding her good night, his look of admiration, his pressure of her hand. She could feel it even now thrilling her whole soul with a joy such as she had never known before.

The next afternoon Ruddington took Eleanor and Grace to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they spent a couple of hours looking at pictures and statuary. Ruddington talked wisely of the paintings, criticising them freely, when he had made sure that neither Grace nor Eleanor was anything of an art critic. He liked the coloring of this, the pose of that, and the atmosphere of another. Some were atrocious, without artistic feeling—were in bad drawing, and the handling was crude. In others the technique was bad—not action enough.

"The realistic school has gone by," he said. "My own taste," he continued, "is the impressionist style. It's modern, you know—doesn't weary the eye so—free from all the little details characteristic of the old school. My own opinion is that the realistic style belongs to the age of stage coaches, not to this age of steam railroads and electricity."

"Isn't he clever?" said Eleanor, her eyes following him eagerly as he strode down the street. Grace and she were at the door of the Hammonds' house, waiting for the bell to be answered.

"Yes, he talks very well, and seems to know about art," answered Grace.

"I had no idea he had such a knowledge of paintings; but Jack Riddles told me he was awfully clever. Jack said that his only regret at getting married was that he should see less of Mr. Ruddington. You know they were like brothers. Poor fellow, he must miss Jack so much!"

"Yes—Mr. Riddles has Mabel to comfort him."

"And Mr. Ruddington has nobody. He lives alone in an apartment, too, with only a valet. How lonely it must be."

"I should think it would be horribly lonely; but you know men seem to like that sort of life."

"Mr. Ruddington doesn't—he told me so himself."

"Oh, we enjoyed the museum so much, mamma!" said Grace, throwing herself

wearily into a chair. "Just tired standing, that's all."

"It was a perfectly lovely afternoon," added Eleanor.

The two girls spoke of the pictures, and told what Ruddington had said of them, and of art in general. They were so enthusiastic that Mrs. Hammond became anxious to meet Ruddington herself, thinking that he must indeed be a clever man, as Eleanor assured her. Thus the way was made easy for Ruddington to see more of Eleanor during her visit at the Hammonds'.

V

"THIS is awfully jolly," said Margaret Van Zant, glancing hurriedly over a note that awaited her on the breakfast table. "So nice of him, too—just listen, mamma," and she read aloud:

MY DEAR MISS VAN ZANT:

Here is a surprise for you. I have been ordered to England, to take the place of our London correspondent, and I shall sail one week from tomorrow. I would like to give you a little pleasure before going, and I can think of nothing better than a theater party with a dinner at Delmonico's. If this meets with your approval, and you will name an evening, I shall be very glad.

I would suggest that you invite your mother and father, and one or two young ladies, as may suit you best. I want you to meet my friend, Harley Vernon, and will take the liberty of inviting him to be one of the party. I am sure you will like him. He is the best fellow in all the wide, wide world.

Always sincerely,

TOM MERWYN.

"Isn't he lovely, mamma?" exclaimed Margaret, with all a girl's enthusiasm. "He specially tells me to invite you and papa."

She read over again that part of Merwyn's note bearing on this point.

"What a generous fellow he is!" replied Mrs. Van Zant, delighted quite as much as her daughter at the prospect of the pleasure before them.

"Seems to have rather good sense," remarked the head of the family, one eye glancing over his paper.

"Margaret's friends are not all so thoughtful of you and me, Chauncey," returned Mrs. Van Zant, pouring the coffee.

"They haven't the brains, my dear."

"Are you not rather severe on my friends, papa?" protested his daughter.

"Severe?" He pushed his paper from him and, removing his glasses, continued: "Take that fellow Ruddington, for example, and answer the question for yourself!"

Mrs. Van Zant smiled.

"But all my friends are not like him. It isn't fair, papa, to select him as a type."

"One such fellow as he, though, brings down the average. Nothing in him—couldn't earn five dollars a week, if he was forced to work for his living. Why you ever asked him to this house is more than I can understand."

"But he goes everywhere, into all the best families."

"Yes, and so do a lot of other idlers, good-for-nothing fellows who breakfast at noon and make asses of themselves the rest of the day—flattering and fawning like so many idiots, without an ounce of humanity in them, or an ounce of good, warm, manly blood!"

"You always get so provoked, papa, at any reference—"

"Yes, at any reference to these worthless specimens I do get provoked. I wish I had the power to ship them all to the mines of Siberia. Society would improve by their absence, and the dude fad would no longer be fashionable."

The head of the family had had his say, as heads of families sometimes will. Then Merwyn's proposition was taken up again, and all were in good humor. Mr. Van Zant was always in good humor except when the discussion turned on idlers like Ruddington, and then he had a way of expressing himself emphatically.

"Yes, it's very nice in Merwyn to invite you and me, my dear," he said, addressing his wife. "I do like a dinner at Delmonico's now and again—everything tastes so good. It's the change, I suppose."

"Whom shall I invite to go with us, mamma?" asked Margaret.

"I'm sure there are any number who would be glad of the invitation."

"I wonder if Lizzie Wharton has returned from Boston!"

"She's not a special favorite with your father, you know."

"Oh, I had forgotten that!"

"Don't mind me—this is your affair, not mine," said Mr. Van Zant.

"But I certainly shall mind you. I particularly want you to enjoy the evening."

"Thank you, my little girl! Is this in return for my criticism of your friends? A forgiving spirit you have, like your mother."

"Your father is too sweet for anything," laughed Mrs. Van Zant.

"Well, it's a way I have, you know—can't help it. If you really want to please me, why not invite Eleanor Clayson? I heard you say she is in town."

"Oh, yes. I saw her again at the Tolman wedding, and she was so pretty!"

"I would invite her," said Mrs. Van Zant.

"But she is probably visiting at the Hammonds, and if I were to invite her I would have to invite Grace, too."

"Well, why not?" replied Mrs. Van Zant. "The invitation says one or two girls."

Later in the day Margaret Van Zant sent a note of acceptance to Merwyn, in which she said:

I have invited two girls, one of whom is the sweetest girl in all the wide, wide world.

"Humph, my own words!" laughed Merwyn. "Just what I said of you, old man;" and he handed the note to Vernon.

"The devil!" exclaimed Vernon. "You said I was the sweetest fellow in the world?"

"I didn't use the word 'sweet,' of course. I said 'best fellow,' or something of the sort—just wanted to make it strong, you know."

"And you evidently made it strong; but thunder—she'll expect to see a paragon!"

"And instead she'll see only plain Harley Vernon."

"Yes—very plain. Why in the name of all snobdom did you get me into this thing, anyway? You know I'm no society man."

"Just to have some fun with you before I go. You ought to be willing to contribute something to my pleasure. Only think of the evenings I have given up to you!"

"Yes, when you might have been plunging in the social swirl."

"Yes, plunging, and it's great sport—new girls, new scenes, new sensations—why, it keeps my blood moving—it's a tonic to me. It gives my writing the dash and snap and go that have made me—that have won me this European appointment."

Delmonico's presented a new and interesting sight to Eleanor Clayson. What a well fed, well dressed assemblage of people she saw all about her! Ladies in evening gowns, men in the regulation clawhammers—the popping of corks, the foaming of champagne, the sparkle of diamonds, the brilliant lighting, the pretty faces, the re-

finéd laughter, the alertness of the waiters, the hum of voices—such was the scene which dazzled Eleanor. She forgot herself and forgot Ruddington as she drank in this new phase of life; and Merwyn watched her, and was charmed with her beauty.

"She is sweeter than I expected," he whispered to Margaret Van Zant.

"I am so glad you are pleased with my selection!"

"Delighted—I am, indeed."

"I was sure you would be, she's so pretty."

"Yes, and not a bit blasé—none of that bored expression. But how about my statement? Isn't Vernon a fine fellow?"

"I'm sure he is, since you indorse him so warmly."

"You will indorse him with equal warmth when you know him as I do."

"You will be heartbroken when Mr. Merwyn sails," said Miss Van Zant, turning to Vernon, who sat on her right.

"I shall miss him very much, but I may follow him before very long. I spend a good deal of my time in Europe."

"And now you will have an additional interest in going there."

"Yes—Tom and I are very congenial, though not a bit alike."

"I had fancied that your tastes were very similar."

"Oh, not at all! Tom is full of dash and brilliancy—likes plenty of society and excitement."

"And you don't care a bit for society?"

"Well, I'm hardly an enthusiast over it," laughed Vernon; "but I enjoy a thing of this sort."

"I am so glad you make an exception, otherwise I should feel that you are horribly bored."

"That would be quite impossible tonight, for I specially wanted to meet you—Tom has talked of you so much to me."

"And now you will be disappointed, having formed too generous an idea of me from Mr. Merwyn's kind words."

"Quite the contrary, I assure you; but knowing what Tom told you about me I can realize something of your disappointment, for even in my own estimation I am not the best fellow in all the wide, wide world."

"You quote excellently," laughed Miss Van Zant; "but you know that as an offset I invited the sweetest girl in all the wide, wide world."

"So Tom told me, and upon my soul I think she is very pretty."

"You have carried on this little aside long enough," interposed Merwyn, turning to Vernon. "The rest of us would like a little of Miss Van Zant's time."

"You see how it is, Mrs. Van Zant," said Vernon. "Tom is always doing something to disturb me just when I'm having the best kind of a good time."

"It is a good host, you know, Mr. Vernon, who can keep the conversation general," answered Mrs. Van Zant.

"I am not so sure of that," said her husband, who had been talking quietly with Eleanor. "I find this very much to my taste."

"And to mine, too," added Eleanor, blushing at her own temerity.

"It is very easy to understand Mr. Van Zant's taste," said Merwyn; "but really, I must hold to Mrs. Van Zant's views—strengthens my case, you see."

"That is one of the penalties of being the host," said Vernon. "You have to make yourself general, of course."

"And Mr. Merwyn does it so charmingly," commented Margaret.

"This is delightful, positively," replied Merwyn, and straightway engaged Margaret again in conversation, while Vernon turned to Grace Hammond and improved his acquaintance with her.

Eleanor's father and mother had been friends of the Van Zants for many years. She and Mr. Van Zant were talking over old-time incidents, and presently Mrs. Van Zant joined in their conversation; but in a little while Merwyn managed to engage Eleanor's attention. He was charmed with her.

"It's not because she talks so well," he said to himself. "It's the sweetness of her voice and her ingenuousness, her almost childlike manner."

She found Merwyn bright and pleasing. He was at his best, and his conversation had a breeziness and dash that delighted her. His super-charged spirits were infectious. She was surprised at the ease with which she talked with him, a perfect stranger.

VI

RUDDINGTON was not in an especially happy frame of mind after leaving Margaret Van Zant on the night when she introduced him to Merwyn, but that mood com-

pared with his present one was hilariously joyful. He had learned on the previous day that Eleanor was to be one of Merwyn's theater party, and the intelligence chilled his very soul.

"That fellow is my shadow, pursuing me wherever I go!" he cried out bitterly. "It was he who broke me up with Miss Van Zant, and now Eleanor has fallen into his hands."

Ruddington ground his teeth together, looking, much as he felt, very ugly. He had ransacked his little brain for some feasible means of preventing Eleanor from going, even though she had accepted the invitation, but he found none. He did not dare raise an objection of any sort, and his shrewdness prevented his mentioning to Eleanor that he knew either Margaret Van Zant or Merwyn. There was plainly nothing for him to do but accept the situation as gracefully as he could, hoping meanwhile that his name would not be mentioned, especially in the presence of Miss Van Zant. He felt that she had no admiration for him, although just how any young woman could fail in this respect was a problem beyond his solving. He fancied that she was in love with Merwyn, though as a matter of fact he had seen nothing to warrant such a conclusion; and this theater party strengthened the belief.

"I hope Merwyn is in love with her, too," he meditated. "If he is, there is less danger of his breaking me up with Eleanor Clayson."

Ruddington scowled blackly. He knew that Merwyn and his guests were to dine at Delmonico's, and as the dinner hour drew near he found himself irresistibly drawn thither. Through a window he saw them seated at a table, and noted with pangs of jealousy that Eleanor was beside Merwyn. An intensified hatred took possession of him. His first impulse was to go inside and secure a table near theirs, where he could watch them, and perhaps hear their conversation; but on reflection he did not dare to do this. He paced up and down the sidewalk, with quivering nerves, the bitterness in his heart growing still more bitter.

Several times he pushed on a little farther up the street, as if to get away from the scene that tortured him, but each time he was drawn back to the window, through which he saw only Eleanor and Merwyn. They were talking together now, and their

conversation was animated and gay. Ruddington had never seen Eleanor appear so brilliant before, and Merwyn's eyes, it seemed to the watcher, were blazing with admiration.

Dinner was over, and the curtain had risen at the theater. Eleanor sat in the front of the box, and her fresh young face, with its brilliant coloring and pleasing lines, attracted many eyes, Ruddington's among them. He had taken an admission ticket, and was standing with others at the back of the theater, where he would not be recognized by those in the box.

Merwyn's head was bent toward Eleanor's, and they talked of the play and the setting, watching the performance meanwhile. He told her something of the actors, of their characteristics and their history, commenting favorably or satirically as the acting gave opportunity. All this added much to her enjoyment. Ruddington, who watched her through his opera glasses, saw and understood, and the fires of jealousy burned fiercely within him.

The next day, when he called on Eleanor, he did so with many misgivings, but to his great relief he found himself greeted as warmly as ever. It was evident to him now that he had alarmed himself needlessly. Her regard for him was too plain to be mistaken. Why should he delay longer? Why not tell her of his love now?

"But I have known her only ten days," he reflected. "Would not so precipitate a proposal endanger my chances?"

He decided that it would be unwise, and gave her nothing more than looks of love—looks which, to his delight, he saw reflected in her eyes. He saw much of her during the week that followed, and at each meeting he was convinced anew that she loved him.

Mabel was at home again now.

"I am happier than ever," she said to Eleanor, "and love Jack more and more every day." Then she asked, with a curious little twinkle in her eye: "But how is the affair between you and Mr. Ruddington progressing?"

Eleanor blushed and protested. Mabel threw her arms about her friend and kissed her rapturously.

"I'm so glad, dear, so glad—and Jack will be so glad!"

VII

MAY had come, and with it the green leaves, the fresh, soft grass, and the buds

and blossoms with their sweet odors. The birds filled the air with song, and spring-time joy was everywhere. Eleanor Clayson was happy, too, for thoughts of Ruddington filled her heart. She had been at home for a month now, and the mail brought her frequent letters from him; and was there ever any one who could indite such letters? This was Eleanor's thought as she read them over and over.

He told her always how he missed her—how sunless New York was without her—how he longed to be with her, and of the happiness her letters brought him. He talked of Mabel and Jack—of their happiness together in their cozy little home. Mabel wrote to Eleanor, confirming all this, adding little feminine touches that gave realism to the picture of domestic bliss. She talked of Ruddington, too—of his loneliness in his apartment, with no one but his valet—of Jack's love for him, and of her own admiration. She told how much he was with them, and of the pleasure his visits gave them.

Eleanor read this, and her heart glowed with love. She went to her dressing table and took from one of the drawers a jewel case. It contained a withered bunch of violets, around which was tastefully knotted a ribbon of delicate shade. Eleanor pressed the dried flowers to her lips, saying softly to herself:

"And he gave them to me!" She sighed as only an impressionable girl can sigh. "It was the night before I came home when he told me that he loved me."

The scene came back to her for the thousandth time in all its vividness, thrilling her as it did on that deliriously happy night. Eleanor had told no one of Ruddington's proposal, not even Mabel, though her heart was bursting with the joy that filled it. She dare not promise him her hand without the consent of her father and mother, but she had assured him of her undying love, and they had agreed that it was better to say nothing about the matter until her parents' sanction could be had.

She had, however, confided to her mother the fact that she was much pleased with a Mr. Ruddington, the best man at Mabel's wedding. He had shown her a good deal of attention, she said; had sent her flowers, and in many ways had added to the pleasure of her New York visit. Mrs. Clayson had a mother's pride, and was flattered that her daughter had made so good an

impression; but Mr. Clayson's brow darkened when his wife told him what Eleanor had said.

"Best man at a wedding!" he repeated.

There was an expression in his tone that caused Mrs. Clayson to say:

"But I am sure that is nothing against him, my dear."

"It doesn't argue much in his favor, though," returned the husband. "I like to see a man doing a man's work."

"Well, isn't it a man's work to be best man?"

"You and I had no best man, and I guess nobody ever discovered any trouble with the way we were tied."

"But the fashion in New York is different, dear."

"Damn the fashion, I say! I don't take any stock in nonsense, anyway, and I don't take any stock in a young man who has nothing better to do than to chase after such affairs."

"But this was an evening wedding, and being best man did not necessarily take any of his time from business."

Mr. Clayson made no reply, but walked to the window and looked out into the darkness, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets and his head bent in thought. He and his wife were alone. Eleanor had gone up to her room.

"How far has this affair gone, wife?" he said presently, turning away from the window and walking slowly up and down the room.

"You mean between Eleanor and this man?" replied Mrs. Clayson, troubled at her husband's manner.

"Yes. You know Eleanor is at an impressionable age."

"But, my dear, you are allowing your imagination to worry you."

"Perhaps I am," was the quiet response.

"Simply because a man shows a girl a little attention, it doesn't signify that he is in love with her," argued Mrs. Clayson.

"No, I know it does not, but Eleanor's manner — haven't you noticed? — and the letters, too."

"I've noticed that she seems to be in excellent spirits, but I suppose it's due to her seeing Mabel again, and to the pleasure of her visit. You know she has always had a good deal of correspondence."

"I hope your theory is right; but these love affairs, you know, are troublesome problems."

"Eleanor is sure to love some one sooner or later."

"Certainly she will, and I want her to; but I want the fellow she loves to be a man — some one worthy of her, who can step into my place and relieve me of all this care. It has been a pretty steady pull with us, wife. The business has grown so fast, and so many people have depended upon me, that I've had little leisure for you; and now I'm beginning to feel that I'm not so young as I was once. The responsibility of managing all this property doesn't rest on me so lightly as it used to; but if Eleanor only marries the right man, it will be all right, and you and I will go abroad and see the world."

This conversation resulted in Mrs. Clayson's decision to learn whether Eleanor actually had any serious regard for Ruddington. She began by talking of Mabel and the wedding, thus cautiously approaching the subject that was in her thoughts. Eleanor went over the story again, telling in detail all about the rehearsal and the ceremony, but with a tendency to dwell on Ruddington that her mother had not noticed before.

"It is very nice that all the bridal party were so agreeable, and I am delighted that you received so much attention," said Mrs. Clayson, feeling her way slowly.

"Yes, every one was lovely to me, and particularly Mr. Ruddington. He is the nicest man, mamma! I wish you could know him!"

"It was very good of him to give you so much pleasure, dear, and I wish we had some way of showing our appreciation of his kindness."

"I wish we had!" agreed Eleanor.

"I suppose he is rich, and has everything that money can buy?"

"Yes, I'm sure he must be rich. He dresses awfully well, and takes his meals at Delmonico's."

"Of course, then, there is nothing we can send him; but your father, you know, my dear, dislikes very much to have you under obligations to any one."

"I know he does, but I couldn't very well refuse to accept the flowers Mr. Ruddington sent me, he was so nice and gentlemanly about it."

"Certainly you had to be polite, my dear; but the problem is, what can we do for him?"

Eleanor sighed.

"If only we lived nearer New York, we could ask him to make us a visit," returned Mrs. Clayson.

Eleanor's heart bounded.

"I think he wouldn't mind the distance, mamma," she said eagerly, her face flushing a little.

Mrs. Clayson's eyes were alert, but apparently she saw nothing.

"Oh, but he wouldn't think of coming away up here! Besides, he would find it so stupid."

"We have our horses, you know, mamma, and, besides, he is very fond of the country—he told me so. He said, too, that he had grown tired of popular watering places, and thought he would like to come into the country this summer, where he could be quiet."

"But of course he won't have his vacation until the middle of the summer," suggested Mrs. Clayson.

"Oh, but he isn't in business! He's like Jack, you know—lives on his income."

"Isn't Mabel's husband in business?" queried Mrs. Clayson, feeling a chill of horror, for it was plain to her now that Eleanor was more deeply interested in Ruddington than she had supposed, and that Ruddington was an idler.

"Oh, no—Jack is just a gentleman, and he and Mabel have the best time. I don't see why people want to work as father does, anyway. Only think how you have stayed at home all these years!"

That night Mrs. Clayson had another talk with her husband regarding Eleanor and Ruddington.

"I am afraid you are right, dear," she said, and she rehearsed the conversation of the afternoon.

"And he is an idler!" reflected Mr. Clayson, the color gone from his face.

"A gentleman, Eleanor calls him," replied Mrs. Clayson, feeling deeply for her husband.

"So Mabel has married an idler!" he murmured to himself. "This fellow is an idler like the other, and Eleanor loves him! An idler—my daughter—Eleanor!"

The strong man's head was bowed in sorrow.

It was late when Mr. Clayson and his wife went to bed. They had talked far into the night, discussing the situation in all its gravity.

"There is but one thing to do," he said. "This infatuation must be broken off!"

He spoke as one who weighed well his words and fully intended that they should be enforced.

VIII

WHILE Mr. and Mrs. Clayson were deliberating as to the best method to pursue regarding Eleanor, the problem became complicated by Ruddington's unexpected appearance on the scene. He came unannounced, designing to give Eleanor a surprise. On his arrival in town he sent her a note, saying that he would call at five that afternoon. She was enraptured, and rushed to her mother with the news.

"Oh, mamma, he is in town, and will be here at five!" she exclaimed excitedly, her eyes beaming with delight.

"Who will be here at five?" asked Mrs. Clayson, comprehending in a flash the full import of the news, and trying very hard to conceal her real feelings.

"Why, Mr. Ruddington! See, here is his note," and Eleanor read it aloud.

"Mr. Ruddington! Well, this is indeed a surprise!"

"Isn't it delightful? I'm so glad, mamma, for now you can see him, and we can entertain him. Isn't it strange? Only the other day you were regretting, you know, that we did not live nearer New York, so that he could visit us."

"Yes, it is very odd," returned Mrs. Clayson, feeling that her effort to appear pleased was not quite up to the point of good acting.

"I shall be so glad to see him, and he can tell me all about Mabel and Jack," Eleanor went on enthusiastically.

"Yes, he can tell you all about Mabel and Jack," answered her mother, struggling for something appropriate to say.

"I do hope we can give him a good time! He was so nice to me in New York, you know, mamma;" and with these words Eleanor ran away to her own room to dress.

"So this fellow has the assurance to come to our home!" said Mrs. Clayson to herself indignantly.

Her first thought was to call her daughter back and tell the girl plainly that she should not see Ruddington—that he would not be allowed to enter the house. She was on the point of acting on this impulse when she recalled her husband's advice that it would be best to deal gently and diplomatically with Eleanor. Accordingly she prepared to receive Ruddington, and then

dispatched a note to Mr. Clayson, which closed as follows:

You had better drop in, as if by accident, at half past five. Prepare yourself to be as agreeable as I am trying to be.

Several days before, Mr. Clayson had urged that it would be wisest to be gentle and diplomatic with Eleanor; but on this particular afternoon, when he had read his wife's note, there was nothing in his manner that suggested any further belief in a peaceable and conciliatory policy. An uninterested observer might have fallen into the error of considering him a demonstrative man, capable on occasions of making the air about him sulphurous. Unquestionably he was deeply moved. Even Faulkner Ruddington would have admitted this, had he happened to enter Mr. Clayson's presence at the moment.

It was perhaps better that he did not do so. He had pictured Mr. Clayson as an ideal father-in-law. His sensibilities, therefore, might have been shocked, and his ideal shattered. It is always unfortunate to begin an acquaintance in that way; and Ruddington showed much discernment in choosing to meet his prospective father-in-law an hour later.

His arrival was well timed. The sixty minutes that intervened between the receipt of the note from his wife and his entry into his drawing-room had transformed Mr. Clayson into a sunny-tempered diplomat. Ruddington had kept his appointment punctiliously. Eleanor had awaited his coming anxiously. When she heard his step on the veranda, and knew that he would be with her in another minute, she saw, to her dismay, that her mother evidently intended to remain in the room. She could hardly control herself, realizing that the meeting would be painfully unlike the one that had warmed her fancy and filled her heart with ever increasing love; but she could not ask her mother to withdraw. The disappointment was so keen that it was with a struggle that she kept back the tears.

An instant later, however, the pressure of Ruddington's hand did much to console her. She formally presented the visitor to her mother, and all three at once fell into conversation.

"I had to come into this part of the world on business that brought me here quite unexpectedly," said Ruddington, his words being intended chiefly for Mrs. Clay-

son. "I found that by making a little detour I could come here, and I felt that I could not deny myself the pleasure of paying my respects to Miss Clayson and her parents."

"It was a happy thought, Mr. Ruddington," replied Mrs. Clayson cautiously.

"How beautifully he put it!" thought Eleanor, beaming with admiration. "Yes, we are so glad you came," she said. "I can hardly realize that you are really here—so far from New York!"

Ruddington took it for granted that Mrs. Clayson had intended to express pleasure at his calling, and he felt surer of his ground. He had invented the little fiction about a business errand with a view to overcoming any possible hostility on the part of Eleanor's parents.

"It worked splendidly," he said to himself, "and sounded rather well, I fancy—the detour and all that. I only wish the old man had been here! Nothing like killing two birds with one stone."

"We are much indebted to you, Mr. Ruddington, for your kindness to my daughter during her visit to New York," said Mrs. Clayson, exerting herself to be particularly cordial.

"Oh, it was a pleasure to me, I am sure," he replied. "Besides, you know, I did not do very much for her."

"I think you were very generous; and you must be such a busy man, with so many demands upon your time!"

"Yes, there is a good deal going on all the while in New York society; but, then, one can always place his time where it will yield him the most pleasure."

His eyes turned toward Eleanor's, and her cheeks burned brightly. Mrs. Clayson quickly changed the conversation to Mabel Riddles, and Ruddington gave a glowing picture of her pretty home.

"She and Jack are supremely happy," he said. "Every time I see them I can't help feeling a bit envious. Jack is such a lucky fellow, you know!"

"He certainly is a lucky fellow," returned Mrs. Clayson; "for Mabel must make a sweet little wife."

"Charming, perfectly charming," answered Ruddington, and thus the conversation ran.

Eleanor was delighted at the favorable impression the visitor had evidently made on her mother.

"Why, Raymond!" exclaimed Mrs.

Clayson a few moments later, as her husband entered the room. "I'm so glad you have come home early—here is Mr. Ruddington of New York;" and a formal presentation was made.

Eleanor held her breath. She had dreaded this meeting, feeling that her father would not be in his most sunny mood. She knew something of his opinion of men who were not engaged in any business occupation—knew, too, what sort of man he wanted her to marry. To be sure, she had said nothing of her love for Ruddington; and yet there was an indefinable dread in her heart that made her shudder when her father appeared at the drawing-room door. He had come home, too, half an hour earlier than usual, and this fact was portentous of something dreadful. Her relief, therefore, was unspeakable when she saw him take Ruddington's hand and greet her lover in the most kindly manner.

"It is all plain before me now!" she said to herself, her heart thrilled with joy.

Ruddington, too, had dreaded meeting Mr. Clayson.

"I never could get on at all with men, anyway," he had said to himself; "and Eleanor's father is the sort, I judge, that will not have the best effect on my nerves."

He had learned from Mabel that Mr. Clayson was a man of strong character and positive convictions. His relief, accordingly, at the cordial greeting he received was little less than Eleanor's.

Mrs. Clayson asked him to remain to dinner.

"Yes, Mr. Ruddington must dine with us," urged Mr. Clayson heartily.

"This is a cinch—a perfect walk-over!" said Ruddington to himself, at the same time accepting with effusive thanks.

Mrs. Clayson begged to be excused while she gave directions for dinner.

"It is working all right," thought Ruddington. "The old man will leave in a minute or two, and we shall be alone, Eleanor and I!"

"Papa will have to dress for dinner," Eleanor told herself, "and then we will have a few moments to ourselves, Faulkner and I!"

She closed her hand tightly, pressing her finger nails well into the flesh to make sure that all this was not a dream; but Mr. Clayson talked on, and the great clock in the corner of the hall ticked on. Eleanor moved about nervously in her chair, trying

to seem interested in the conversation. Finally she got up, walked to the window, looked out, and saw nothing. She sighed and came back to her seat.

Ruddington groaned inwardly, feeling that he would like to throttle "this old chump," as he mentally expressed it, but at the same time struggling to make the impression of his life.

Mr. Clayson comprehended the whole situation, and the tumult of his soul was lulled by the gratification he derived.

Presently Mrs. Clayson came back and joined in the conversation. Mr. Clayson then excused himself and went to his room to dress.

Eleanor's spirits dropped. Ruddington began to feel that he would like it just as much if Mr. and Mrs. Clayson had been less pleased with him. He had called with the idea that if any man could make a telling impression, he was that man; but he did not anticipate that he would so completely capture their hearts. He felt proud of his triumph, and congratulated himself on the belief that they would not oppose his offer of marriage to Eleanor.

"She's a better catch than Jack Riddles got," he said to himself; "and the old folks are not so objectionable as the Tolmans would be to me."

The conversation dragged a little, though Mrs. Clayson was no less animated than before.

"What makes you so quiet, Eleanor?" she asked presently.

"Oh, I've been listening to you and Mr. Ruddington—you two get on so well together," replied the daughter, flushing at this bit of deception.

"Mr. Ruddington makes himself very agreeable," answered Mrs. Clayson.

"I always get on charmingly with the mothers," returned Ruddington, feeling that he must say something, and not knowing just what to say.

A moment later he wished that he had said almost anything else. The thought darted through his brain that Eleanor's mother would never wish to leave him now.

Dinner was announced, and Mr. Clayson joined them at the table. Ruddington sat on one side, with Eleanor directly opposite him.

"We should not have had this visit from Mr. Ruddington, dear, but for a business matter that brought him to this neighborhood," said Mrs. Clayson.

"Ah, then you have business interests up in this part of the country?" said Mr. Clayson, speaking to Ruddington.

"Yes—oh, yes!" replied the visitor.

"Active business?"

"Yes, active business—very active just now."

"It requires a good deal of your time, then, of course?"

"Oh, my, yes—a good deal, of course. You know business is business, and has to be looked after."

"Yes, certainly, but some kinds more than others."

"Oh, to be sure, some kinds more than others—yes, that's it!"

"What is the business?" asked Mr. Clayson, without apology for his inquisitive tendency.

"The business—the business—ah, my business—yes, yes," stammered Ruddington, at his wit's end. Casting his eye around with a vague hope of finding a suggestion in his emergency, he happened to see on the wall opposite him a picture of a rural landscape, with a row of haystacks in the distance. "Yes, yes—hay," he went on desperately, very red in the face, and cursing himself for having invented any apology for calling on Eleanor.

"Hay!" exclaimed Mr. Clayson, almost dumfounded.

"Yes, hay," answered Ruddington, saying to himself at the same time: "What in the devil do I know about hay, anyway? What is there in hay? Why did I ever mention hay? Oh, hay of all things!"

He groaned almost audibly, the perspiration starting out from every pore.

"The old crop is all marketed, of course," replied Mr. Clayson, glancing significantly at his wife.

"Oh, yes—marketed long ago."

"And the new crop is not yet harvested."

"No, not all harvested yet."

As a matter of fact, it was not yet grown.

"I don't see where you find any activity in hay just now, Mr. Ruddington."

"Well, that is odd, isn't it?" laughed Ruddington. "Yes, that is the odd part of it—a secret, you know—a new process and all that, but I mustn't give it away."

Ruddington mopped his brow and appeared about as uncomfortable as a lover in the presence of his sweetheart could well be. He looked at her appealingly, but he was too deeply involved for her to extricate him—too deeply involved for human aid.

A lie, however trivial, is pretty sure to work injury to its author in one way or another. This one had placed Ruddington at Mr. Clayson's mercy.

"Oh, I see!" continued the latter, relentlessly pursuing his victim. "Something on the patent order."

"That's it, yes—on the patent order—a new invention," answered Ruddington, grasping frantically at anything that promised escape.

"This is a great age," exclaimed Mr. Clayson, apparently much impressed. "Only think of the inventions that this century has brought out! Why, gas, even, is actually manufactured from water now, and of all things think of burning water! Think, too, of converting the great trees of the forest into paper, as I do at my mills, or of making a sort of straw from them, as has been done for a long time; and now here comes Mr. Ruddington with a patent for making hay. Well, well, what will come next, I wonder? You and I will soon be too old-fashioned, wife, if these inventors keep on."

"I think we shall, dear," laughed Mrs. Clayson; "but I am so much interested in your patent, Mr. Ruddington—you know a woman's curiosity!"

"Oh, yes, funny, isn't it?" laughed Ruddington, with a laugh that was very forced. "Really, the funniest thing in all the world is a woman's curiosity," he rattled on inanely, frantically endeavoring to turn the conversation to any subject, no matter what, so long as that of hay was dropped; but Mr. Clayson was specially interested in hay just now, and again he went back to Ruddington's patent hay manufacture.

"Yes, women are curious, for a fact, but I must admit that I am a good deal like a woman. You see, I am something of an inventor myself, and anything like your patent interests me. Hay, I confess, is about the last thing I would have expected to see manufactured; but if gas can be made out of water, why shouldn't hay be made from some other substance? It is not so many years ago that people would have scoffed at the idea of making printing paper from wood; but it is done, and it is my business to do it. The point that I can't get over in the manufacture of hay, though, is to understand where the nutrient comes in manufactured hay. It is easy enough to imitate it, to be sure."

"But I haven't said that my patent

actually manufactured the hay," replied Ruddington, laughing as if it were a good joke.

"That is so, dear," said Mrs. Clayson. "I thought you were assuming too much."

"Ah, I see!" returned Mr. Clayson, seeming embarrassed by his error. "Perhaps I was going a little too fast. I'm a manufacturer myself, you see, and naturally I think that every new invention has something to do with manufacturing. Then, too, of course, it is a matter of guesswork with me. Perhaps, Mr. Ruddington, your patent is a little on the incubator order. I can understand how hay manufactured on that plan might have nutriment in it. Am I not right this time?"

"Well, yes, you are getting nearer to the theory now," replied Ruddington, chancing the answer, and wondering what in the world an incubator was like.

"But I don't see how that could be," said Mrs. Clayson, a good second to her husband.

"Why, only think for a minute," replied Mr. Clayson. "Hasn't an incubated chicken just as much juice and sweetness as one hatched and grown the natural way?"

Mrs. Clayson admitted that this was true, and deftly turned the conversation, lacking the heart to see Ruddington tortured further. Mr. Clayson saw her purpose and followed her lead, though it was with a struggle that he brought himself to do so.

"To be sure," he told himself consolingly, "I have taken the fellow's measure and exposed him to Eleanor as the hypocrite that he is—the silly fool!"

But Eleanor was blind. She had ventured a remark now and again, trying to help her lover out of his evident embarrassment, but with ill success. She was young, and had little knowledge of business, but all this talk about the manufacture of hay seemed absurd. Ruddington had not said in so many words that the hay was manufactured. It was her father who had said this, and her father was a manufacturer, and he was so serious and so much interested in the discussion. Her mother, too, was equally serious, and Eleanor was bewildered and annoyed. Why in the world the conversation had taken such a turn was a mystery to her.

"Hay, of all things, is the most ridiculous topic for the dinner table," she said

to herself, blushing with an embarrassment little less than that of Ruddington.

Had she seen that her father and mother were making fun of the man she loved, she would have left the table in what she would have regarded as justifiable indignation; but they acted their rôles so well that she discovered no insincerity in their manner or in what they said. Ruddington, too, was deceived. Once or twice his suspicions had been aroused, but Mr. Clayson argued so well for the reasonableness of the thing that they were speedily quieted, and the young man from New York concluded that it would be an easy matter to make these country people, as he considered them, believe anything, however improbable.

Ruddington remained until late in the evening, and he had not been alone with Eleanor. Her parents' cordiality had not abated in the slightest. They talked until there was nothing more to talk of, and still they talked on. Eleanor listened and wondered, and grew weary, talking a little herself at times, but there was no spirit in her words.

Ruddington bore up bravely, but when ten o'clock came, and there was no indication of Mr. and Mrs. Clayson's withdrawal, his spirits sank. He did little more than answer in monosyllables, though he fought desperately to keep up an appearance of interest in the conversation. The clock struck the half hour, and the strain began to tell on Mr. and Mrs. Clayson. Eleanor had lost all interest in everything, and Ruddington's mood had become sullen. He was disappointed, worn out, and furiously angry.

Up to this point Mr. Clayson had spared his victim the agony of listening to the story that he now began telling. It was a long, weary, dreary story, without a redeeming merit, designed for just such occasions as this. Ten minutes went by, and then five more, and then another five, and Mr. Clayson talked on. Mrs. Clayson forced herself to laugh occasionally, as if highly amused. Eleanor was disgusted and heart sick. Ruddington was white with anger, moving restlessly about in his chair and swearing vengeance on his torturer.

The clock struck eleven, and the story was not yet finished. Eleanor became indignant, and it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from protesting openly. Mr. Clayson saw and understood, and proceeded in the same monotonous way with

the story that had no ending. Ruddington had stood it until his endurance was gone, and finally he made a deliberate break for the door, apologizing for the necessity of going so soon, alleging as an excuse that he was worn out with travel, having been on the train all the previous night. Mr. and Mrs. Clayson expressed regret that he must leave so early, and in company with Eleanor followed him to the door, bidding him a cordial good night.

When he was gone, Eleanor at once went up to her room, and throwing herself upon a couch, sought relief in tears. It was long after midnight before the tumult of her heart ceased and her eyes closed in slumber.

IX

THERE WAS no sweetness in Ruddington's soul as he made his way slowly through dark streets to the little three-story wooden hotel where he had left his luggage. He had never been in worse humor in all his life—he had never been so disappointed in all his life.

"Here I have come all the way from New York to see Eleanor, and haven't had so much as one minute alone with her!" he fumed.

He went over the conversation of the afternoon and evening, winding up in a rage of no ordinary dimensions.

"Her father is the most garrulous old bore I have ever seen," he broke out savagely. "I'd like to choke him—the old idiot! I wonder if he thinks I came here to see him! If he does, he's mightily mistaken, and there's his wife—hung to me like a leech—yes, like a leech. What the devil do they think I want of them, anyway, and why did the old man presume to ask me what my business was? Didn't know any better, that's why—ill-bred cads!"

Ruddington's features were a study of disgust.

"It got me into a fine hole, too," he went on. "Made an ass of myself, that's what I did, and what did I gain by it? Gain! I was a martyr, that's what I was, and that story he told—damn me if I ever heard such rot! What is all this trip going to amount to, anyway, and when shall I see Eleanor alone?"

It was toward noon when Ruddington awoke from a slumber that came to him only when the night was well spent. He had studied over the situation for hours,

but had failed to fix upon any practicable plan of procedure. The suspicion, however, had dawned upon him that possibly the excessive cordiality of Mr. and Mrs. Clayson was a ruse to prevent his seeing Eleanor alone. He resolved to test this theory, and another afternoon and evening with the Claysons satisfied him that he was right. The condition of his feelings may be judged from the following note, which he wrote on returning to his hotel:

MY DEAR ELEANOR:

I am indignant at the treatment I have received from your father and mother. They stick to me like glue, preventing me absolutely from seeing you alone. If they had refused me entrance to their home, I would not mind it so much. I would then know better how to meet the issue; but this pretense of cordial feeling, under the circumstances, is maddening.

You must know that I came all the way from New York purposely to see you. The story about business was an invention designed to shield you as well as myself. I have been in this miserable town now nearly two days, and have not had a minute with you except in the presence of hostile eyes. I am exasperated—desperate, even—and will stand no more trifling. I shall see your father in the morning, and let him understand that I propose to enforce my rights. You and I are engaged, and he may as well know it. I must see you, and I ask you now to help me arrange a meeting.

As ever affectionately,
FAULKNER RUDDINGTON.

Ruddington left this note at the hotel office with instructions that it should be delivered by hand at nine o'clock the following morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Clayson had become convinced, since Ruddington's arrival, that the situation was much more serious than they had anticipated. Eleanor had not succeeded in concealing her admiration for him. Love was in her eyes, and the evident restraint under which the constant presence of her parents placed her made the depth of her affection only too plain. His first visit shattered her composure, and his second, which was even more disappointing than the first, threw her into a nervous state bordering on hysteria.

She had passed a restless night, and was sitting in the library with her mother, pale and with a far-away look in her eyes, when Ruddington's note was placed in her hand. She knew at once from whom it came, and her first impulse was to go to her own room and read it by herself; but her better judgment told her that this would precipitate an inquiry that would reveal the secret of

her heart. In her present state she felt that she could not bear this. She tore open the envelope and ran her eyes hastily down the note.

Mrs. Clayson had been reading the morning paper mechanically, thinking more of Eleanor than of the news. The note from Ruddington added to her anxiety, and she dropped the paper aimlessly in her lap. The little color Eleanor had had was gone, and as she read the words: "I shall see your father in the morning and let him understand that I propose to enforce my rights. You and I are engaged, and he may as well know it," her nerves gave way and she burst out crying hysterically. Mrs. Clayson ran to her and tried to soothe and quiet her, infolding her in her arms. Eleanor sobbed uncontrollably, her whole body rocked with emotion and fear.

"I must understand this matter, Eleanor, dear," said her mother, kissing her. "I must know what this man has said to you."

Eleanor shrank within herself and trembled, grasping the already crumpled note more tightly within her hand. Mrs. Clayson's heart beat alternately with a sympathy and dread, and she was very tender with Eleanor. At last she had the note, and as her eye passed over the lines that revealed the character of the writer, she felt a bitter contempt for him. When she reached the words: "You and I are engaged," she cried out as if pierced to the heart by a dagger's point.

True to his word, Ruddington went to Mr. Clayson's office, determined to enforce his rights as the *fiancé* of the rich man's daughter. It had been many years since the morning sun had seen him out at so early an hour, but he had important work on hand. It was a trifle after nine when the door of Mr. Clayson's private office closed behind him, and the two men were alone, face to face.

"Take this chair," said Mr. Clayson, placing it close to the one he was to occupy himself.

"Thank you, but I can't stop to sit down," said Ruddington, agitated and pale. "I came here," he continued, and then hesitated. Mr. Clayson looked stern and cold. "I came to have an understanding with you," he began again, clutching nervously at the corner of the desk beside him. "You don't understand my position, but I understand yours. It's all plain to me why you have been so affable, why you have

stuck to me the way you have, not allowing me a minute with Eleanor."

"With Eleanor!" repeated Mr. Clayson. "By what right, sir, do you speak of my daughter in this familiar way?"

"By the right she gave me, sir—by the sacred right of our engagement."

"Your engagement—you engaged to my daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Clayson, trembling with indignation. "And you have the effrontery to come here and tell me that you are engaged to her, you miserable cur?"

"Be careful how you talk to me, sir, or I'll make you regret it! I didn't come here to be insulted, but to demand my rights as the accepted *fiancé* of your daughter."

The office door swung back with an angry jerk, and a man shot through the opening. That man was Ruddington, and he was propelled by a boot, behind which was a tempest of anger and energy.

"You will suffer for this!" he howled in pain, turning to shake his fist at the enraged father, when he was at a safe distance. "You will find out that a Ruddington is no man to be trifled with! I'll make it hot for you—yes, sir, hot for you!"

His accelerated step took him quickly around the corner, where he was lost to view.

X

DURING Eleanor's visit to New York she was in an atmosphere of love, tender and passionate. Mabel talked of love and of her own happiness. There was something in this which at first charmed Eleanor and then filled her heart with an indefinable yearning that obscured the sunlight and was as a great weight upon her spirits. She saw much of Ruddington, as best man to the groom, and heard much in his praise from both Mabel and her husband. Ruddington wooed her ardently, with such flattery and attention as would naturally win the favor of a girl whose life had been so simple and so free from social entanglements. Eleanor had no thought of loving him—no thought of loving any one; but she accepted his attention with childlike freedom. She listened to Mabel and breathed the air of love, and lo, the sadness of her soul was gone, and she was happy.

Reason had played no part in all this. She had simply fallen asleep deep down in the valley, where the atmosphere was dark and depressing, and on awaking she found

herself on the heights, where the air was exhilarating and buoyant and the sunlight was brighter and softer than she had ever seen before.

The dagger plunged into the breast by the stealthy hand of an assassin leaves no less a wound, when it is withdrawn, than if the thrust were self-inflicted, with the deliberate purpose of suicide. The cut would be as deep and as painful and as slow to heal in the one case as in the other. So, too, with Eleanor's love for Ruddington. It filled her heart and soul, and was a part of her very life. What matters it how it came to be there, so long as it was there, and was genuine and sincere? Indeed, is it not harder to tear out a sentiment that enters into one's life as the sunshine enters into the flower, than to dislodge a kindred feeling that reason dallies with, giving it at length a place in the heart?

Eleanor Clayson's nature was one of sentiment and impulse and enthusiasm, and she was sweeter and more lovable for all this; but she was not without mind and will and force. Her character had another side than that of sentiment—an element inherited from her father's plain, rugged personality, which fitted her to meet the struggle before her now; and it was to be a struggle that would tear the girl's heart from her and dry up the springs of her lighter nature.

Her father and mother saw this, and their pity was deep and sorrowful. They were as gentle with her as the soft summer winds. Eleanor was prostrated, and they nursed her with love and tenderness. Her heart was torn and bleeding. The color had gone from her cheeks, the brightness of the world had faded. The impulse and enthusiasm and spirit had gone out of her life; but her face had a sweetness and pathos, and her manner a gentleness that drew her father and mother nearer to her with a love such as they had never before known.

"It is all plain to me now, mamma," she said one day, when they were sitting together in her room. "I can see just how it came about, and I am so sorry for you and papa. I know it has broken your hearts, and you have been so kind and patient and tender!"

"Don't think of us, dear, but think only of yourself. Try to get strong and well and forget the past, and you will make us very happy again," replied the mother softly.

This was the first reference that had been made to the unfortunate love affair since Eleanor broke down on reading Ruddington's letter. The five weeks that had passed since then had been spent by her wholly in her own room, where she lay for the most part in bed, or upon an easy couch, without the strength or ambition to sit up; but now she sat in a great easy chair, and as she spoke she dropped her eyes and looked thoughtfully down.

"If only I had not made the visit to Mabel, it never would have happened," she resumed.

"But it is all right now, dear, so do not think about it," answered Mrs. Clayson soothingly.

"I have thought it over and over so many times," continued Eleanor, "and I can see now that it was all a mistake—and such a mistake!"

A sigh of pain shook the girl's delicate body.

Her mother had gone to her and was sitting on an arm of the great chair.

"It is perhaps all for the best, my child," she said, stooping down and kissing her, with one arm about her neck.

"No, mamma, I cannot think that. God is not cruel."

"God is never cruel, my dear, never; but His ways are beyond our knowing. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.'"

The conversation ran on this theme for a time, and then Eleanor went back to the point from which she had started.

"I must forget Mabel," she said, and the words seemed to pain her as she uttered them. "She is a friend of his, and he is intimate with her husband. I have thought it all out, mamma, and have decided to cut away from everything that would bring him to my mind. I must forget him. If only I could forget myself—forget all about this affair and his unworthiness and my own folly! But I can't—no, I can't drive the thoughts from me. I have seen how you and papa have suffered for my sake, and I know how silly you must think me; but I know you love me, mamma dear; you and papa; and I love you."

"I know you do, my child," said the mother, the tears stealing down her cheeks. "We shall all be very happy again some day."

This conversation was a great relief to Eleanor's overburdened heart. For some time she had been wishing to talk frankly

with her mother, but she had not felt equal to the effort. Human nature seems to demand a friendship to which it can freely tell its trials and sorrows. A secret of any consequence locked up in one's breast burns its way out or drives the one thus burdened to the verge of insanity, or even beyond the verge.

On his return home that night, Mr. Clayson found Eleanor brighter and less depressed. He went to her room and sat with her for half an hour, as had been his custom since her illness had kept her there.

"Don't worry any more, papa," she said, taking his hand in hers. "It is all over now. I have thought it all out, and I see the sort of man he is."

"You rejoice my heart, my dear," he replied; "and I am indeed glad that you have reached this conclusion yourself. It has been very hard for you, but it is so much better that you should decide as you have without any conflict with your mother and myself."

"I am glad, too," answered Eleanor. "You both have been so sweet and lovely through it all, never saying an unkind word or speaking of him as most parents would have spoken! I was blind, and the first night he dined with us I could not understand you; but it is all plain now. You were so nice about it when you saw that he was telling a falsehood, and you were doing it all for me, when you must have felt so bitterly! I know your idea of manhood, and how you abhor deceit and falsity. Lizzie"—one of the servants—"told me of the scene in your office, and I wonder that you didn't send me away forever in disgrace!"

XI

It is October, and the Van Zants are on board an ocean greyhound, bound for Europe. With them is a young woman, rather tall, and of pleasing figure. Her features are well modeled, and with her deep blue eyes she would be regarded as very pretty but for the lack of color and animation in her face. She is refined, and dresses tastefully. Her manner is thoughtful, and at times even sad. She mingles little with the passengers, and often steals away by herself and becomes lost in fancy or absorbed in the pages of a book—not such a book as the frivolous girl is wont to read.

This serious, studious young woman is

Eleanor Clayson, matured and saddened by a sorrow so deep that it seems to have changed her whole nature. There is little in her now to suggest the gay, impulsive girl of six months before.

Her father and mother had felt that a protracted stay in Europe, among new scenes, and with the ocean between herself and all that had saddened her life, might bring back something of her old vivacity; but Mr. Clayson could not leave his business, and Mrs. Clayson hesitated to go without him. Eleanor herself wanted to go abroad that she might improve her mind by visiting the famous capitals of the Old World, with their paintings and statuary and architecture. She had learned the rudiments of drawing at Forrestville, and since her recovery from her mental and physical prostration, she had made genuine progress with her art. She wanted to put herself in the hands of a competent French instructor, or to enter one of the regular schools of Paris.

There was also another reason why Eleanor was anxious to go abroad. A second cousin of hers, a Clayson by name, was employed in her father's business. He had risen solely on his own merits until now his position was one of trust and importance. Mr. Clayson was much attached to the young man, and saw in him excellent business qualifications—such qualifications as he hoped to find in his future son-in-law.

Eleanor knew what was in her father's mind—knew that he had fixed his heart on her learning to care for young Clayson. He had never urged this desire, but little acts of his, it was plain to her, were designed to bring about a closer relationship between her and the young man of his choice. For her part, she wanted to get away from all associations that suggested love and marriage; and of all men this cousin, with all the merits that her father saw in him, would have been the last to inspire sentiment in her heart, even if it were possible that such a feeling could ever be hers again.

The Van Zants knew of her desire to go abroad, and, on deciding to go themselves, at once invited her to join them. She accepted the invitation promptly, thinking herself very fortunate in having the opportunity to travel with such delightful people. She felt, too, that Margaret Van Zant, with her cheerful, sunny nature, would be a most agreeable companion.

"Remember that we'll be with you, dear, in July," said Mrs. Clayson, kissing Eleanor good-by amid tears of sorrow at the parting.

"Yes, in July we'll join you—I have promised your mother, you know," added her father softly, and then he and his wife hurried off the steamer and were soon lost to Eleanor's eyes.

XII

"WELL, you're here at last!" exclaimed Merwyn, giving Harley Vernon a hearty hand clasp.

"Yes, actually here, and mighty glad to see you again, my boy," returned Vernon. "But how are you? Tell me all about yourself."

It was late in June, and Vernon had just arrived in London. He made his way straight to the *Metropolis* office.

"I'm in fine form," answered Merwyn, "and like London immensely. The work is exactly to my taste."

"You never looked better. More sleep and less society, I fancy."

"Oh, no! On the contrary, less sleep and more society."

"You beat all the men I ever saw, Merwyn. Positively you grow younger on a diet of dissipation."

"It isn't dissipation with me, old man—just nature, that's all."

"And what a buoyant nature it is—a perfect fortune in itself—light, sunny, gay, impulsive—"

"There, there!" interrupted Merwyn. "You'll embarrass me if you keep on. I thought you were coming two months ago. What has kept you all this time?"

"So I thought myself, but one thing and another detained me, as I wrote you."

"One thing and another' is good," laughed Merwyn.

"One can't always manage things just as he would wish," answered Vernon, flushing.

"You seem to have managed them, though, pretty much to suit you this time!"

"How's that?"

"Oh, I know all about it! And you are the cynic who abhorred society, and used to urge me to give it up!"

"Upon my soul, I don't know what you're driving at."

"No, of course you don't! You always had a way of seeming very dense. But really, old man, I can't realize that the tender passion has landed you; and to think

that it should all come about from meeting her at my little theater party!"

"It seems to be no use to deny it," laughed Vernon.

"No, not a bit, and I congratulate you heartily. Margaret Van Zant is a charming girl."

"But I'm not far enough along with the affair to be congratulated, Tom. I don't mind saying to you, though, that I am very fond of her. I can hardly understand it myself. As you say, I am about the last man to fall in love; but I have made the plunge, and I don't know where I shall land."

"I'm glad you have made it, Harley, and I fancy you will land all right. She's a girl of good sense, and there are not many men like you, old fellow."

"The same old story, Tom!" protested Vernon.

"But I'm serious now, as I always was on that point. How many men are there of your wealth who settle down to hard work as you do—who have made the reputation you have at your age?"

"It isn't work to me."

"No, it's a passion with you. You were born an artist, and how you ever managed to fall in love is a mystery to me. Why, I know a hundred girls to your one—"

"And love them all," Vernon put in.

"Yes, love them all," replied Merwyn, "and it's great fun. I don't see how a fellow can tie himself down to only one. Why, it would take all the snap and spirit out of life for me!"

"You are a puzzle to me, Merwyn. I could no more bring myself to the point of flitting from flower to flower, as you do, than I could hope to live now without the love that has come into my life. You'll never know what real happiness is, my boy, if you keep on in this way."

"Well, if I don't know what happiness is—the real genuine, simon pure brand of happiness—then I have struck a mighty good counterfeit."

"You think you have, I know, but you haven't. There's nothing soul satisfying in all this flitting about. A man whose heart has never throbbed with genuine, sincere love knows nothing of the true joys of life."

"Well, it's rich, positively rich, old man, to hear you raving in this way—you, the cynic of only a few months ago, who were wedded to your art, and who so often pictured to me the ideal bachelor home that

you and myself were to occupy—a home with luxuries and comforts and art and beauty that the gods would have coveted!"

"Yes, so I did," admitted Vernon, "and I was sincere. That was the most pleasing picture before me at that time, but now—why, my boy, I wouldn't take such a home as a gift and live in it alone. What is life, anyway, without some sentiment in it?"

"It's indeed refreshing, old man, to see such enthusiasm; but tell me, does Miss Van Zant respond with equal fervor?"

"Well, that's a problem. I don't quite know myself. Sometimes I think she does, and again I fancy that the sentiment is all on my side."

"Not a very interesting state of things, surely, for so ardent a lover as you are," said Merwyn, wondering how a few short months could have made such a change in Vernon.

"It isn't without interest, though. There's an uncertainty about it—a hope, an expectancy—that lends a certain charm to it all."

"It's a bad case you have, old man—the worst I've ever seen; but just how you can extract any pleasure out of the thought that perhaps she cares nothing for you is a mystery to me."

"I wouldn't put it in just that way, though. Of course, I hope she does care very much for me, and I fancy she does, but—well, I'm afraid I can't make you understand. There never was any logic in my head, anyway."

"There never was any logic in the head of any man so deeply in love," laughed Merwyn. "But I'm delighted, anyway, to see you so happy, even though our bachelor castle is knocked into a thousand flinders. I ought to have known that it would go to smash. These quiet, retiring fellows, like yourself, who persistently avoid the fair sex and pose as woman haters, are dead sure to marry. I never yet knew an exception; but men like myself, who are never without girls, are the ones who swell the bachelor ranks."

Presently the conversation broadened, and the two talked of things in America, and of the people they knew in common.

"You have been doing great work, Merwyn, since you came over here," said Vernon. "Your Sunday letters have attracted much attention, and I understand that they have added a good many thousands to the circulation of the *Metropolis*. You have

given a touch of realism to social matters, in particular, that no London news has ever had."

"I have had exceptional opportunities, I think, for gathering facts in social circles. A number of my acquaintances were over here when I came, and others have come since. Through them I have met nearly all the Americans of any note who live here permanently and are in the social swim. The difficult thing is to get started, you know. My start was all I could have hoped for, and now I have quite an extensive acquaintance in English society. I know a great many club men and politicians and others who are not averse to having their names appear in American journals with favorable mention."

"I can understand just how your social connections have helped you. From them you have gained the facts, the gossip, and so forth, but you have put it all into exceptionally readable form. Your writing has snap and humor and sparkle, and your breaking away from the traditional reportorial style adds greatly to the interest of your letters."

"I am heartily glad you like them so much, but then you would naturally be prejudiced in my favor," replied Merwyn.

"Yes, so I would; but then I know what others think of the work you are doing. Your reputation as a newspaper man has grown amazingly in New York since you left there in March."

"Harley, that's very gratifying to hear, of course. Such words of approval, when they are sincere, stimulate me to do my best. I received a letter from the chief a few weeks ago, in which he expressed his satisfaction with the work I was doing, and said that he had ordered my salary increased by a couple of thousand dollars."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Vernon, his face showing the pleasure he felt at Merwyn's good fortune. "You'll be able to save something now," he continued, knowing so well the freedom with which his friend spent money.

"I'm afraid that isn't in my nature," replied Merwyn lightly. "In fact, if my salary were double its present size, I'm sure I should come out in debt at the end of the year."

"I hoped you had turned over a new leaf," said Vernon, disappointed.

"Yes, I have," laughed Merwyn, "and I've struck a page where the expenses make

my head dizzy. Well, it's all in a lifetime. I'm enjoying myself, and some day I'll strike a bonanza and clear off all my debts."

"You've been saying that for the last five years, my boy, and I'm afraid your debts have been growing all the time."

"Yes, but that's nothing. I arrange it so that they don't trouble me; and then they are not so large, either. My share in the family property is enough, you know, to pay all I owe, if I should die, and beyond that I don't care. I shouldn't like to go out of the world, you see, feeling that some one had lost anything by me."

XIII

VERNON remained a few days in London with Merwyn, and then went to Paris. He rented a studio on the Rue Legendre, and settled down at once to serious work. He had been a pupil of Jean Delarose, the famous figure painter, whose studio was on the Parc Monceau. Delarose, now an old man, had conceived a great liking for Vernon. He saw in the young American promise of excellent work.

"M. Vernon," he was wont to say, "will be my monument. His drawing is excellent, his conception striking, his coloring simply perfect. Give his figures tenderness and warmth and feeling, and he will be a great painter. That will come later, I feel sure. He is young yet."

Vernon lost no time in calling upon Delarose, and the meeting was one of mutual happiness.

"You have been a long time coming," said the old artist. "I have wanted very much to have you here under my eye, where I could watch your progress day by day."

"And I wanted to be here, too, but I was detained longer in America than I had any reason to expect when I went over last fall."

"Well, you are here now, and ready for work, I hope."

"Yes, I never felt so much like serious application as I do now. I have several studies that I want to put on canvas. One of them is particularly good, I think. It represents two young girls, who have been roommates at school, and are very fond of each other, but have been separated for some months. One of the girls, during the absence of the other, has become engaged, and is very much in love. They are in the pretty boudoir of the betrothed. All the surroundings breathe of sentiment and art.

She is telling her old school companion of her love and her happiness, and her features blaze with rapturous joy. The other is drinking deeply of the delicious draft. Her manner is feverish and eager, and her face is flushed and filled with wonder and the soft light of kindling love."

"Splendid, splendid!" cried Delarose. "But the fire—the love—can you paint the love?"

"I don't know, but I would like to make the attempt. The subject interests me, and I can see the scene vividly before my eyes," replied Vernon.

"Ah, but you must feel! It is not enough to see. Your picture will be cold. It must have life and fire and love, or it will not do—no, no, it will not do;" and the old man shook his head dubiously. "I would not advise you to undertake so difficult a subject," he went on; "but if your heart is set on it, as I see it is, I will not urge my objections."

"My heart is filled with the theme, and I am enthusiastic to get to work on it."

"Yes, by all means begin while the fancy burns in your soul. I shall watch your progress with a keener interest than ever before, for there is something in your manner that makes me feel your work will be warmer and tenderer than that of a year ago."

Vernon flushed slightly, wondering if his old instructor suspected the love that was in his heart. In a few days he had fitted up a boudoir to correspond exactly with the one of his fancy. Then models were secured, and he began to work without delay.

The summer had gone and the autumn was well advanced, and Vernon was still at work on the canvas he had begun in June. He was proceeding slowly and thoughtfully. Merwyn was often in Paris, and always spent some pleasant hours with his old friend, whom he had repeatedly urged to go back with him to London; but all persuasion failed, for Vernon's very soul seemed wrapped in the work he was doing. One day late in October, however, Merwyn received a telegram from Vernon, saying:

I shall be in London to-morrow and will see you during the day.

"What does this mean?" thought Merwyn, speculating as to Vernon's motive. "Something extraordinary, certainly, or he would never leave that picture."

"The Van Zants are in town," said Vernon, grasping his friend's hand on the following day.

"The Van Zants!" exclaimed Merwyn.

"Yes, from New York—they are at the Metropole now."

"They are?"

"Yes, and who do you think is with them?"

"I can't imagine, to save me."

"Miss Clayson."

"Oh, yes—the girl that Miss Van Zant invited to join us on the night of the theater party."

"Yes."

"I remember her very well—quite pretty. What has brought them all over here? This explains your presence in London—you sly dog, you kept it very quiet, didn't you?"

Vernon laughed heartily. There was about him the air of delight that characterizes a schoolboy when his teacher breaks down and he gets an unexpected holiday.

Merwyn called on the Van Zants several times, in company with Vernon, and entertained them at dinner and in other ways. Vernon, it seemed, had suddenly conceived an extraordinary fondness for the British metropolis, and his trips between London and Paris were repeated once or twice each week. He and Margaret Van Zant were very happy in each other's society, and Merwyn lost no opportunity of bringing them together.

Eleanor was naturally included in all invitations, but her spirits were not in sympathy with gayety of any sort. This was evident to Merwyn's trained eye.

"What has happened to Miss Clayson?" he asked Mrs. Van Zant, one day. "She doesn't seem at all happy."

"No, she is not," answered the latter, and then she related the particulars of Eleanor's unfortunate attachment.

Merwyn listened to the story, but found little in it to excite his interest until the name of Ruddington was mentioned. Then he felt a shudder pass over him that left a strange feeling in his heart.

"So that fellow has blighted her life!" he said to himself bitterly, and the thought seemed to haunt him.

He had hoped never to hear the name of Ruddington again, for he had come to feel that there was something uncanny in his encounters with the man.

"Why didn't you tell me of the affair between Miss Clayson and that fellow Ruddington?" he said, when he and Vernon were alone.

"Simply because I knew nothing about it myself until three or four days ago, and I haven't seen you since then," replied Vernon.

"I'm surprised that Miss Van Zant didn't tell you months ago."

"But I doubt if she knew anything of it herself when I left New York."

"Perhaps that is so," mused Merwyn.

"But how it has changed that poor girl! I saw her only once, to be sure, but then she was as light-hearted and full of life as one could wish."

"Yes, I remember she was, and I have seen something of the same old enthusiasm in her once since she has been here. It was when you were in Berlin. She had learned that I was an artist, and she was delighted. 'I came abroad partly to study art,' she said, 'and I'm so glad I know you.' We had a long talk, and she was as animated as one whose heart has never known a pang. I found that she already knows something of drawing, and that she is serious in her purpose to make an artist of herself."

"So she's going to study art!" replied Merwyn. "Well," he continued carelessly, "perhaps it's the best thing she can do under the circumstances," and he turned the conversation to another topic, as if through indifference rather than by design.

XIV

"I'm very glad we found you in London, Mr. Merwyn," said Mrs. Van Zant; "and I'm glad, too, of this opportunity of talking with you alone. You have been most hospitable to us all, and we thoroughly appreciate such courtesy. Your kindness and the confidence I have in you lead me to ask a peculiar favor of you. A little more than a week ago," she continued slowly, as if debating with herself whether she was acting wisely, "you asked me what had happened to Miss Clayson. I told you of her trouble, and now I want to take you into my confidence and enlist your aid in her behalf."

"I shall be sincerely glad to help you in any way possible," replied Merwyn, wondering what in the world a newspaper man could do in an affair of the heart.

"I was sure you would," returned Mrs. Van Zant gratefully. "Eleanor is a sweet

girl, and I am very fond of her—not only for her own lovable qualities, but for the sake of her father and mother, who are very dear friends of my husband and myself. When she met Ruddington she was little more than a child, with no knowledge of the world. Her life had been spent at home in a small country town, with her father and mother, and at a boarding school, among girls. She knew nothing of the love that makes the hearts of man and woman one until she was thrown in with Ruddington, under circumstances that had a peculiar influence over her. She heard him praised so warmly that it never occurred to her to question his character. He came from a good family, she knew, and Mabel's husband and Mabel herself had idealized him. Eleanor was susceptible, and before she realized it she found herself in love with Ruddington. She gave her whole soul to him without reserve. To such a nature as hers the discovery of his true character, and the knowledge that he was unworthy of her pure, unselfish love, brought a shock that completely broke her heart. She saw her own folly, and condemned herself bitterly. Her reason, her knowledge of all she owed to her father and mother, and even her own self-respect, commanded her to give him up. The struggle was fierce and long, but in the end her will conquered, and she tore him from her heart. At first her father and mother were much alarmed about her health, but gradually she threw off her lethargy, though she has never fully regained her strength. It makes my heart ache to look at her, she is so changed, poor girl!"

"She certainly looks as if she had suffered cruelly," said Merwyn, who had listened attentively; "but what can I do in her interest?"

"I feel pretty sure that you can do a good deal for her, if you are willing to co-operate with me."

"Command me, by all means."

"You had better not commit yourself until I tell you what I want of you."

"No, I don't think I need wait for that. I'm quite willing to trust myself in your hands."

"You are very good to say so," replied Mrs. Van Zant, appreciating the compliment. "If you were a more susceptible man," she continued, "I would not dare approach you on this matter, but knowing you so well—"

"Yes, knowing me so well," laughed Merwyn, "you think it would be safe to use me as a sort of antidote!"

"Yes, exactly, and I'm glad to have your help. You see, I approached the subject cautiously."

"I noticed it, and thought I would help you out; but you need not have hesitated. I understand your idea, and I'm not sure but that the experiment is worth trying."

"I believe it is; but are you quite sure that you would willingly undertake to play the part?"

"Yes, positively sure," answered Merwyn, with enthusiasm. "It would be great sport for me; and, besides, I might utilize my experience in some way. I might make a novel of it, or a play. See, I am dreaming of fame already!"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Zant, delighted at Merwyn's enthusiasm. "I'm sure you can play the lover to perfection," she went on; "but you must promise me one thing."

"And that is?"

"And that is that you will abandon the rôle when I say the word."

"Certainly, I promise in all sincerity, and I hope that the ruse will result as favorably as you anticipate. I shall enjoy the part I am to act, and for several reasons—first, hoping that Miss Clayson will be benefited; then there's the novelty, the study of character, and finally there's pleasure in the thought of effacing that man Ruddington's likeness from her heart."

Merwyn proceeded to tell of his rather strange feeling toward the discarded lover, giving his reasons for it.

"That's very odd," responded Mrs. Van Zant, who seemed a good deal impressed by the apparent fatality that brought the two men together so strangely. "And now you meet again, in a way," she said, wondering if there was anything supernatural in it all.

"Yes, as you say, it's another sort of clash. Between you and me, I have the feeling that that fellow is my *bête noire*. It's an uncanny, weird fancy, I know, but I can't quite throw it off."

"It is probably just a series of coincidences," said Mrs. Van Zant, feeling a trifle uncomfortable, nevertheless. "But regarding this little ruse of ours," she went on. "We must proceed with the utmost delicacy and caution. If Eleanor were to suspect our motives, or to get the impres-

sion that you really love her, she would absolutely refuse to see you."

"I understand you, and think I realize her feelings. I can see how repugnant any thought of love would be to her now."

"Precisely! Your attentions must be so delicate and gradual that she will not detect the interest that is stealing into her heart until the old sorrow is dislodged and is passing quietly out of her life."

"An interesting problem this is, indeed," returned Merwyn, regarding it seriously. "There is nothing that so appeals to the human heart as the emotions of the human heart."

"That's true, no doubt. The risky side of all this is the danger of going too far and leaving the poor girl in a worse state than before."

"Yes, I see that, too—assuming, of course, that I shall be successful in interesting her."

"I almost shrink from the experiment even now, through fear of the possible consequences."

"The danger of which you speak is the only one, isn't it?"

"It is the one that causes me most apprehension, but there's another," and Mrs. Van Zant looked significantly at Merwyn.

"I can't imagine what it is," he replied.

"Can't you imagine yourself becoming seriously in love while trying to dispel the gloom from Eleanor's heart?"

"Imagine myself in love?" returned Merwyn, surprised. "Well, hardly—can you?"

"I can't think of you as seriously attentive to any one girl. Still, you know the danger of playing with fire."

"Yes, I know, but I have no fear for myself," and Merwyn laughed heartily at the absurdity of the idea.

"Very well—I shall not worry about you, since you are so confident of yourself," said Mrs. Van Zant.

"No, don't. It would be useless, I assure you. You had better put your mind, instead, on helping along this little affair. I shall require a good deal of assistance, and even then I doubt the success of my attempt to interest Miss Clayson."

"I wish I were as sure that you won't interest her too much as I'm confident that she will find a growing pleasure in your society. This, of course, is on the assumption that you play your rôle with delicacy and tact."

"Trust me for that," said Merwyn, and then the two discussed the best method of procedure.

XV

"My friend Vernon tells me that you are ambitious to become an artist, Miss Clayson," said Merwyn, the first time he met Eleanor after his compact with Mrs. Van Zant.

"I must plead guilty to the charge," replied the girl. "I do have the ambition, but I am afraid that there my natural qualifications for an artist end."

"Isn't it possible that you underestimate your abilities? Vernon was quite enthusiastic in talking of your purpose, and of the beginning you have already made."

"But it's so easy to overestimate oneself, you know, Mr. Merwyn," said Eleanor modestly.

"Yes, I know it is; but this estimate was Vernon's, not yours."

"I'm glad to know that he spoke so favorably of me. He very kindly offered to find a good instructor for me when I reach Paris."

"He will do so with pleasure, I am sure, and he can help you in many ways. He has a large acquaintance among artists, and can secure you advantages that you could hardly hope to get without the help of a friend in the profession. By the way, it occurs to me that I have a book in my library that might interest you. It treats of art theoretically, and discusses the relative merits of the realistic and impressionistic schools. If you would like to look it over, I will send it to you in the morning."

"You are very kind. I certainly would like to see it, and thank you so much!"

"I imagine that you will find a good many suggestions in it. If you do, you will be making some progress in your art even while you are impatiently waiting here in London. I presume you have already seen the National Gallery and the pictures in the South Kensington Museum?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I have not visited either of them yet. We have done a good deal of sight-seeing, but Mr. Van Zant doesn't care very much for art."

"Of course you won't leave London without seeing them?"

"Oh, no, indeed! I hope to spend a good deal of time in both places. There is nothing that interests me so much as paintings."

"If you and Miss Van Zant would care

to give Vernon and myself a day, we will devote it entirely to art. We might visit not only the National Gallery and the South Kensington Museum, but also some of the picture galleries of Piccadilly and Bond Street."

"Thank you very much," said Eleanor, a spark of pleasure kindling in her face. "Nothing would please me so well, and I am sure that Margaret would be delighted to see good pictures under such favorable circumstances."

"My own knowledge of art is superficial, but Vernon is a perfect mine of information. He can tell you something interesting about all the leading painters and their work."

"This will do rather well for a beginning," said Merwyn to himself, satisfied with the start he had made. "No trouble with my tact and delicacy so far, I fancy; and, by Jove, she responded better than I expected—not so absolutely miserable as I thought!"

Vernon ran over to London the next night, and the following day was spent in art galleries by the two girls, himself, and Merwyn. At times Vernon and Miss Van Zant drifted away by themselves, leaving Merwyn and Eleanor alone; and as the day advanced this tendency became more noticeable. Merwyn was never more agreeable, and he found that when put to the test he possessed more general information on art subjects, and knew more of the lives of famous artists, than he had given himself credit for.

He was on the alert, and watched Eleanor closely, to make sure that she was not wearying of him; and he took good care that they were not left alone too frequently. He was particularly genial with Miss Van Zant. As often as seemed to suit his purpose, he drew her aside, leaving Vernon and Eleanor alone.

Vernon chafed at this, and wondered why Merwyn persisted in separating him from the girl he loved. At first he thought little of it, but after repetition had followed repetition, he became a trifle uncomfortable. There was less spirit in his conversation; and all this helped Merwyn, for when he came back to Eleanor she found that he managed to interest her more than Vernon, even on art subjects. His conversation was less technical, and for that reason alone more pleasing; and then, too, it was spirited, and was lightened up here

and there with little touches of humor that brought a smile to her lips despite herself.

A few days later Merwyn made a discovery that resulted in bringing him and Eleanor still closer together. The mail had just arrived from New York, and it brought the latest issues of the *Metropolis*. The last number off the press prior to the sailing of the steamer contained this item:

BENNINGTON FALLS, N. Y., November 3.—A great fire is raging in this village. It broke out at midnight, and a dozen buildings have already been consumed. One of the Clayson paper mills is on fire, and it looks as if nothing could save the others.

"This must be her father's property," thought Merwyn, mentally referring to Eleanor, and he quickly made his way to the Metropole and sent up his card to her.

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you—nothing serious, though," he said to her a few moments later.

"Bad news!" she repeated, frightened at his words.

"Only a fire, that's all;" and he showed her the item in the *Metropolis*.

"Yes, papa's mills!" she cried. "Poor papa, it will break his heart; and this is all it says—nothing can save them—and it was on the third, nine days ago, and nothing since! Oh, this is terrible, and here I am so far away!"

"These reports are often exaggerated, you know," said Merwyn. "Perhaps, after all, the mills were saved."

"Oh, I wish I could think so! Papa's heart is bound up in those mills, and I tremble for what may have happened."

When Merwyn reached his office he sent the following cablegram:

METROPOLIS, New York:

Wire damage Clayson mills, Bennington Falls.
MERWYN.

A few hours later he once more called on Eleanor, and placed in her hand this dispatch:

MERWYN, London:

One mill destroyed, another badly damaged—loss partially covered.

"This is not so bad as you feared, I hope," he said cheerily.

"No, not so bad, but it's terrible, and it will make father's work so hard! I don't know what he will do with his contracts."

"But one gets over such things with

less difficulty than would seem possible at first. I dare say your father will be able to manage it in some way."

"Of course he must, but—" and she paused. The fact of Merwyn's thoughtfulness had suddenly dawned upon her, and she asked: "You cabled over to get this information for me, didn't you?"

"It was a pleasure to do it for you," replied Merwyn.

"I thank you so much," she said gratefully. "I should have worried myself ill, I am sure, but for your kindness."

The news of the fire was a real shock to Eleanor. She forgot herself, and thought instead of the misfortune at home, wondering how her father and mother bore it. Her anxiety for them filled her heart, and the effect upon herself was salutary. This news was the first thing that had stirred her interest deeply in many weeks.

Mrs. Van Zant noticed the change in Eleanor, and complimented Merwyn upon his courtesy.

"You were very thoughtful to cable for the particulars," she told him. "Eleanor appreciates your generosity so much. She has spoken of it a dozen times already."

The next steamer brought Eleanor a letter from her mother, which contained encouraging news, and the assurance that her father was in good spirits. Her anxiety about matters at home was quieted. The sorrow that saddened her had been temporarily dislodged, and now that her mind was free to go back to it, she found that it did not assimilate with her temperament as it had before.

Merwyn was quick to note this effect, and cast about for some means of still further diverting her mind from herself. This was not the season for racing and outdoor sports, but by accident he learned of something that might serve his purpose, and at once wrote to Mrs. Van Zant, telling her that the "fours" were to be rowed at Oxford on the first three days of the following week. He added that he could secure places on the university boathouse, and would be extremely glad to have her and her party accompany him to the famous old city as his guests on one of the three days.

He received a note of acceptance in reply, naming Tuesday as the day. Merwyn then posted a note to Harley Vernon, telling him that he must be one of the party.

Tuesday dawned bright and clear, for a

November day in London, and all were ready for the outing with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Van Zant. The latter was diplomatically indisposed, and her husband begged to be excused, on the ground that it was his duty to remain at home with her.

"I'm very sorry," she said to Merwyn, "but you and Mr. Vernon and the girls can go without a chaperon, and I'm sure that you will have just as good a time without us."

"Oh, no, not so good," protested Merwyn, "and I am very sorry that you and Mr. Van Zant cannot go with us; but you know I won't allow your absence to spoil the day."

"No, I am sure you won't. Your heart is too light and gay for that."

"It's the better way, don't you think? Gives one a great deal more happiness."

The party took a train for Oxford, leaving Paddington at ten o'clock, so that they might have time to see something of the university town before the racing began. They drove about for a couple of hours, making a round of the colleges, and then sat down to a luncheon in the old-fashioned dining room of the Mitre, on "the High." A little after two they walked down to the river, passing through the classic quadrangles of Christ Church and over the old Folly bridge. Merwyn piloted them along the towpath to the university boathouse, where he had secured seats on the balcony, commanding a good view of the course.

There were two heats to be rowed that afternoon. The first was between Exeter and New College, and as a race proved tame, the Exeter boat, which had the first station, being so much faster that the result was evident as soon as they came in view. The second heat was between Magdalen and Brasenose. The crews were admitted to be the two strongest of the year, and it was expected that whichever succeeded in defeating the other would be the winner of the challenge cup.

When they hove in sight, they were almost exactly the starting distance apart. The wild excitement of the crowd running along the bank, and shouting for their favorites, communicated itself to the spectators on the boathouse balcony. Merwyn and Vernon, who had a friendly wager on the result, were scarcely less interested than the collegians themselves. Miss Van Zant's sympathies were with Brasenose, the boat Vernon was backing, while Eleanor had

unconsciously enlisted herself under the crimson flag of Magdalen.

As the boats drew nearer, the excitement became intense. Men yelled and women waved their parasols. The race was an even one. When the final spurt came, neither had gained on the other. The boat-house was reached, and still the relative distance was unchanged. They shot by the long line of college barges and neared the winning posts, where the judges stood, pistol in hand, ready to fire. A hundred yards from the finish neither could have claimed the race, but at this point Brasenose perceptibly weakened, and in another moment a pistol shot proclaimed Magdalen the winner amid deafening shouts.

Eleanor was completely carried away by the excitement. Her colors were triumphant, Merwyn had won from Vernon, and her heart beat with unrestrained enthusiasm. She was the old Eleanor again, with bright cheeks and sparkling eyes, rejoicing in the victory.

"By Jove, she is sweet!" said Merwyn to himself. "She's as pretty as on the night when I first met her."

He had watched her carefully during the race, and was delighted at the effect of the excitement. His interest in Eleanor as a patient—for he regarded her somewhat in that light—grew rapidly from this time on. On one pretext or another he managed to see her more frequently, always strictly observing Mrs. Van Zant's injunction of tact and delicacy.

Dating from the day at Oxford, Eleanor's health and spirits showed marvelous improvement. The color began to come back to her cheeks, her step grew firm and elastic, her gloom gave place to laughter—a laughter such as comes from deep down in the soul that has been shrouded in sorrow—spontaneous, buoyant, joyful laughter.

XVI

ONE night in the early part of December a party of six were dining at the Bristol, in Burlington Gardens. Tom Merwyn was one of them, and he sat beside a young woman whose beauty attracted many eyes in the well filled room. A philosopher of the human heart would have detected in Merwyn's manner toward her suggestions of sentiment such as art could never counterfeit. Eleanor's animation, the attention with which she followed his words, and the unconscious glances that passed from her

eyes to his, would have led this same philosopher to hazard the conjecture that a reciprocal feeling was budding in her heart. The other members of the party were Mr. and Mrs. Van Zant, Harley Vernon, and Miss Van Zant.

Half of the courses had been served, perhaps, when Merwyn discovered a man at a table not far off whose eyes seemed fixed upon him. There was something in the look that caused an uneasy feeling in the newspaper man's breast. Just why this was so, he could not have told. Many men had looked at him quite as intently, to be sure, and yet there was a difference. He tried to determine whether he had ever seen the man before, but it was difficult to distinguish his features clearly. The room was lighted only with candles, and these were dimmed by red shades.

Merwyn bent his head toward Eleanor's, to catch something she was saying to him. An ugly frown darkened the other man's face. Merwyn saw it, and his color left him. The recognition was instantaneous. It was Ruddington.

A shudder passed over Merwyn, as if he had been confronted by a ghost. A feeling flashed through his brain that he had been pursued even to another world.

"But I must think of her," he said to himself quickly. "She must not see him—must not come under his influence again!"

He strove to hold Eleanor's attention to the conversation, exerting himself as never before. It was a struggle, for there was no natural buoyancy in the light, gay words he uttered; but he played the rôle well, and gained confidence as he went on, until all at the table were amazed at the brilliancy and sparkle of his conversation.

Ruddington noticed this, too, and his soul burned with envy and jealousy. Seven months had gone by since he had seen Eleanor. All his attempts to communicate with her had been frustrated. Even Mabel Riddles could tell him nothing of her. He had racked his brain to devise some way to meet her, but every effort failed. His hatred for her father was deep and bitter, and great was his rejoicing when he heard of the fire that brought so heavy a loss to Mr. Clayton.

One day late in November, Mabel learned that Eleanor was in Europe with the Van Zants, and she lost no time in communicating the fact to Ruddington. A gleam of hope shot through his heart, and

he determined to follow her across the ocean. He had been in London only a couple of days when he dropped in at the Bristol for dinner; and now, as he saw Eleanor for the first time since they had been separated, she was beside Merwyn, and evidently happy in his company.

The sight infuriated Ruddington, and a feeling of intense hatred for Merwyn possessed him. He tried to catch the girl's eye, but his efforts were without success. Merwyn, it seemed to him, completely filled her thoughts, and he chafed bitterly.

At length the dinner was over and the street was gained. Merwyn felt like dropping on his knees and thanking Heaven. The strain upon him had been so great that he was anxious to get away by himself, to rest and think at leisure. He walked with the party to the Metropole, managing on the way to fall behind the others with Mrs. Van Zant, and telling her of Ruddington's presence at the Bristol.

When Merwyn was alone, and thought over the events of the evening, he felt a peculiar satisfaction in the knowledge that he had successfully protected so attractive a girl from a threatened danger. That night he dreamed that he was in a strange country. It seemed to him that he had gone far through an uninhabited region. He fancied that he had traveled many days, and the object of his journey he knew not. One night he lay down by the roadside to sleep, hungry and weary. In a few moments he had fallen into a sound slumber, from which he was awakened in the dead of night by deep voices close by in the road. He lay very still, hardly daring to breathe. The conversation was distinct to his ear, but the language the men spoke he knew not. When they were gone, he heard another voice that said to him:

"These men are part of a band of outlaws. Their object is to enter yonder castle and kidnap a little child. It is your mission in this land to protect her. There is no longer time for sleeping. You must start at once!"

He arose and hurried on as he had been bidden, saying to himself ever and anon:

"And it is my mission to protect her—a little child!"

Presently the great stone castle loomed up before him in the darkness, and close by the outer gates was a body of fierce-looking men, evidently those whose voices he had heard a little while before. He left

the road and gained the other side of the hedge. Thus sheltered, he reached the castle unobserved, and was admitted by a feeble old man. He made known his mission, and was welcomed as a deliverer.

The mistress of the castle, he learned to his surprise, was a little girl, not more than four or five years of age; and it was she whom he had been sent to protect against the outlaws. She was very beautiful and very sweet, with bright blue eyes and long flaxen hair. She climbed upon his lap, and, with her little white arms around his neck, and her soft, sweet face against his, gave him a welcome that filled his heart with a sense of pleasure finer and more satisfying than he had ever known before. He felt that he would gladly fight all the bandits of the land, if necessary, to protect her from harm, even though it cost him his life. He thought of himself only as her protector, and he lived for her and loved her as if she were his own child. She grew more beautiful every day in his eyes, and he never ceased to thank the mentor who had sent him to her.

Stories soon spread throughout the land that a strange man of great power had been sent from a far country to protect the young mistress of the castle. The highwaymen were panic-stricken, and fled from the vicinity. All was happiness now within the castle walls. The little girl and her protector were always together. Often they took long walks in the fields, gathering wild flowers of sweet perfume, listening to the songs of the birds, and watching the squirrels and the bees. They were very, very happy together, and life seemed a perpetual dream of bliss. Every day she grew taller, and he marveled much, because he had never seen such growth before.

But now the scene shifted. The castle faded before his eyes, and all was darkness for a time. Then the light came, and they were in a great city, and lo, the little girl was a woman, and her name was Eleanor. New dangers beset her, and she clung to him as never before. He fancied that he saw a man following them as they passed along a street crowded with many people, and he was sorely troubled; but soon he began to regard himself as her knight, and he was very proud and very courageous, willing to risk any danger for her sake. Now that she was a woman, he loved her even more than as a child, but the love was of a different kind.

One day they were sitting together in a large, airy room, and were very, very happy in each other's presence. In another instant she had vanished from his sight and was gone, and he was very lonely without her. It seemed to him that he had never known genuine happiness until he had lived for her alone, and now that she was gone, his life was unutterably sad. He tried to interest himself in the old gayeties that had once brought him pleasure, but now he found them flat and stale. Then he awoke, and laughed heartily at the fancies the night had brought him.

XVII

MRS. VAN ZANT was greatly troubled on learning from Merwyn that Ruddington was in London. She was determined that he should not see Eleanor, and that night she discussed the situation with her husband. They decided to make a hasty departure for Paris, and announced their decision the next morning.

Margaret Van Zant's heart bounded with joy. She wanted to see Paris, but she wanted most to be nearer to Harley Vernon. Eleanor was also delighted, for she was anxious to begin her art studies, and, besides, Paris was the place of all places that she most desired to visit.

At about eleven o'clock that morning a card was sent up to Eleanor. A quick glance revealed the name of Faulkner Ruddington. She staggered as if shocked by a powerful electric current, and was as colorless as marble.

Mrs. Van Zant understood the meaning of this. She ran to Eleanor and clasped her in her arms, saying:

"You must not see him, dear!"

"No, I cannot see him—I cannot! Oh, why did he ever come here?" replied Eleanor, trembling.

"Say there is no answer," said Mrs. Van Zant to the man who brought up the card.

Ruddington was very angry at the reply he received. He went back to the Langham and wrote Eleanor the following note:

MISS CLAYSON:

I have your message, and I am astonished at such treatment from you. Perhaps you forget that the engagement between us is still in force, as it has never been broken off to my knowledge by either you or myself. I have not had a line from your pen or in any way heard from you since your father's outrageous treatment of me last May. He will find out to his own sorrow, some day, what it means to insult a Ruddington.

I have written to you a dozen times, and you have never answered one of my letters. I believed your father and mother responsible for all this contemptible conduct, but now I see that I was mistaken. I have come all the way from America to see you, and you refuse to see me—the man to whom you are engaged. I understand it all. I saw you last night at the Bristol, for I am not blind.

I will not be put off in this way. I have rights, and I shall enforce them. I must and will see you, and I warn you now that it will be the worse for you if you refuse me the interview I ask.

Yours truly,

FAULKNER RUDDINGTON.

Eleanor read this letter, and her eyes flashed fire.

"The monster!" she exclaimed, and passed it to Mrs. Van Zant, feeling that in such an emergency she should have the guidance of one whose knowledge of the world was greater than her own.

"The contemptible fellow!" said Mrs. Van Zant, as her eyes swept over the pages.

"I wish papa were here," returned Eleanor, white with indignation.

"I never saw anything to equal this!"

"The audacity of the fellow—and he dares to threaten me!"

"Yes, threatens you!"

"And says he will have his rights!"

"Did you ever see such assurance?"

"He must be mad."

"No man in his right mind would write such a letter as this."

"And he has the effrontery to say that he followed me over here."

"And claims that you are engaged to him now."

"Oh, dear, why did I ever meet him? And he even threatens papa!"

After the first outburst of her indignation was over, Eleanor became frightened at the possible consequences of so threatening a letter. She felt that Ruddington must be a dangerous man, and her mind was filled with anxiety. She wanted to get away from London, hoping to escape him.

When Ruddington had sent his note to Eleanor, he settled back in his chair and thought. It was clear to him now that the problem before him was a far more difficult one than he had anticipated. He had flattered himself with the belief that Eleanor loved him still, and that he could easily win her over if he could have half an hour's talk with her; but she had refused to see him, and had not even assigned a reason for doing as she did.

The longer he dwelt on the matter, the

uglier he grew. Merwyn finally became the target of his fury.

"He stands between her and me," said Ruddington to himself, bitterly. "She is away from her father's influence now, and but for this miserable reporter it would all be plain sailing for me!"

Ruddington had made so many dismal failures in his attempts to marry a fortune that he had become desperate, and was determined to secure Eleanor at all hazards.

"She is the only child," he argued, "and the property is sure to come to her sooner or later. I have seen any number of cases where the opposition of parents was a dozen times more stubborn, but they all had to yield, and the girl got the money in the end. So it will be with Eleanor—and the old man is enormously rich!"

After a time the force of Ruddington's anger was spent, and he began to regret having sent such a note to Eleanor. Realizing how rash and impolite he had been, he at once wrote a second letter, apologizing profusely for the first, and humbly begging an opportunity of meeting her, when he would explain all to her satisfaction.

Eleanor was genuinely alarmed when the second letter was handed to her, but her alarm was soon turned into a feeling of contempt for the man.

Mr. Van Zant had been absent from the hotel all the morning.

"It's fortunate that I wasn't here when the first letter came," he said, on his return. "I should have found it difficult to restrain myself from going to him at once and giving him a horsewhipping—the miserable specimen of humanity!"

That afternoon at four o'clock the Van Zant party left London for Paris. Merwyn drove to the Victoria Station with them and saw them off, saying that he would see them again before very long.

XVIII

THROUGHOUT that night and the following day Ruddington was in a deplorable state of mind. His letters had been totally ignored, and his indignation knew no bounds. He walked his room in a bitter, revengeful spirit, planning some way to teach Eleanor a lesson that she would not be likely to forget very soon.

"The idea that she should presume to treat me in this way—me, a Ruddington!" he said to himself haughtily. "And who is she, anyway? Did anybody ever hear of

a Clayson, I would like to know? A Clayson—mere money bags, that's all!"

This mood was succeeded by one in which he placed the blame on the Van Zants, believing that they had prevented Eleanor from seeing him and from answering his letters.

"I'd like to make them feel that they'd better not meddle with my affairs, and I'll do it, too," he went on. "They're not so secure in their position as they think they are. I haven't lived in New York all these years for nothing; and besides, I have a grudge against that daughter of theirs. I haven't forgotten her sarcasm the night I met that reporter there, and he's the sort of man that she likes—a nobody, yes, a nobody!"

He had come around to Merwyn again, and the frown on his face was deeper and blacker than before. In a little time the affront he had received from Eleanor and his dislike for the Van Zants were crowded out of his mind by the bitter contempt and burning jealousy he felt for Merwyn. Here was the real target for his revenge.

Ruddington thought over it long and seriously, finally making himself believe that Merwyn was responsible not only for Eleanor's disaffection, but for all the other misfortunes of his life.

"The first thing to do is to show him up to Eleanor," he said to himself. "With him out of the way, and Eleanor over here in Europe, I'll have little difficulty in winning her back. He must be discredited, and he ought to be. What right has he to put himself in my way, I'd like to know? A common fellow—the idea of his presuming to come between Eleanor and me! I understand it all now, and I wish I had made the attack on him, instead of writing those letters; but I can overcome that blunder easily enough," he assured himself.

His conceit was something that never deserted him. The thought that he was a Ruddington was sufficient to lift him out of despondency, however deep.

The object of his attack was now determined, but the question of the best method of procedure was a difficult problem to solve. He bent his mind to the solution, however, with a sort of fierce delight, for his deep jealousy of Merwyn had kindled the fires of hatred in his heart. Such a state of mind is rarely conducive to discretion, and Ruddington's case was no exception. The anonymous letter is the most

commonplace means of attack that suggests itself to the small mind, and Ruddington recorded his measure by sending one to Eleanor at the Metropole. It was, of course, forwarded to her Paris address, the Hôtel du Rhin. The following is a transcript of it:

It is a thankless task, I know, to warn another to beware of one with whom she is in the habit of associating, but my interest is always enlisted when I see a young lady appear in public places in company with a man whose character and social standing are not worthy of her. Such a man is now in London, ostensibly representing a New York paper, but he is, in fact, incapable of doing the work that he is credited with doing. This is a mere hint at his duplicity, but worse than all this is his manner of life, which would shock you if you could but know it.

I think this will serve to start you thinking, and to one of your good sense it will doubtless be sufficient to keep you from contamination by one who is utterly unworthy of your acquaintance. For reasons of my own I will not sign my name to this friendly warning.

The letter was typewritten, with a view to concealing the identity of the author; but even machines sometimes have peculiarities of their own.

Eleanor guessed at once that the anonymous missive came from Ruddington, and her contempt for the fellow was bitter and deep.

"Poor Mr. Merwyn is catching it now," she said to the Van Zants, and then read the letter aloud.

"Well, the idea of saying such things about Tom Merwyn of all men!" exclaimed Miss Van Zant indignantly.

"Merwyn's reputation as a good newspaper man is too well established to be affected by such attacks as this," returned her father.

"I would never have believed that fellow capable of doing anything so low," said Eleanor, and her cheeks flushed with shame at the thought that she had ever cared for such a man. "I feel very much distressed that Mr. Merwyn should come in for this fellow's abuse and slander," she continued. "It is all on my account, of course."

"It's all wicked slander," said Mrs. Van Zant. "There's no nicer fellow anywhere than Tom Merwyn."

"He doesn't need any one to vouch for that," returned her husband.

"Indeed he does not," added Miss Van Zant. "He's a favorite with every one, and has more friends than any man I ever saw."

"And they are among the best people, too," said her mother.

"Yes, among the very best people, and he is such a generous, jolly fellow. Why, only think how he entertained us the other night at the Bristol! I never heard a man say so many clever things in all my life."

Eleanor listened to this praise, and her admiration for Merwyn was quickened. He had been assailed on her account, and she felt a desire to protect him from an enemy whose attack had been cowardly and stealthy. This impulse brought him nearer to her, and throughout the evening, and often during the next few days, while her fingers were busy drawing from casts, her thoughts went back to London and to Merwyn.

XIX

HARLEY VERNON had very nearly finished the painting on which he had been at work since June. In spite of his frequent trips to London after the arrival of the Van Zants, each week advanced it faster than before. There was something in these visits that lifted him to a higher plane of feeling—something that gave him inspiration and delicacy and tenderness of touch. His stroke was surer and his conception better defined.

Delarose saw this, and wondered much, but soon divined the secret of his pupil's heart. He had watched the growth of this canvas with peculiar interest from the first; and now, as the work approached completion, revealing true genius in its author, the old painter was well-nigh beside himself with delight. Vernon's soul was filled with the theme. The days flew by unheeded, and throughout the hours of sunlight he was at his easel, insensible to the pangs of hunger and thirst. He was wrought up to a high state of nervous tension.

One morning he promised himself that the picture should be finished before the light of that day failed him, but the darkness came and the canvas was not yet completed. The expression on the faces was not quite right. It only needed a touch, as it were, to make the figures live; but that touch—ah, that touch, it was not in him! He turned away from the painting, disappointed and depressed.

That evening Vernon sought solace in the presence of Margaret Van Zant, who was now in Paris. It so happened that they were alone, and never, perhaps, did the

gentle influence of a refined woman revive the spirits of a weary man so effectually as now. His mood became buoyant as the air itself, and his whole heart glowed with love. A dozen times he was upon the point of declaring himself to her, but as many times he faltered.

The next morning he was at his work when the day had scarcely broken. Each stroke of the brush now added sentiment and feeling to the canvas; but still there was something wanting. It was perhaps half past ten when he suddenly threw down his palette and hurried from the studio into the street. He hailed a coupé, and ordered the driver to take him to the Hôtel du Rhin as fast as his horse could go.

Arrived there, he sent up his card to Miss Van Zant. He was tortured with misgivings, fearing that he had come too late to find her at the hotel; but she had not gone out, and in another instant Vernon was with her.

"This is an unlooked for pleasure," she said, greeting him cordially.

"Yes—I didn't expect to see you this morning," he answered feverishly; "but I had to come. I couldn't finish the picture without telling you of my love for you. I ought to have done it last night—yes, last night—but now you know. I love you with all my heart. Tell me that you love me a little bit, that you will try to love me, and I'll be the happiest man in all the world!"

For an instant she seemed startled, dazed, by his impetuous words. Then she murmured softly:

"You make me very happy, Harley!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her, and both were happy.

"The picture!" he cried suddenly. "The picture! I can finish it now!"

He dashed from the room and drove in mad haste back to his studio. When he took up his brush, his touch was as the touch of divinity, for it gave life.

"A masterpiece!" cried Delarose, entranced, when his eye fell on the completed canvas. He threw his arms about Vernon and hugged him with unrestrained admiration. "It will make you famous, *mon ami*! I always said it was in you. I knew it was in you, this genius, but not so much. You have gone far beyond my expectations. The fire and love and enthusiasm and life—you have them all, and you are great. M. Vernon, you are a great painter—you are my monument!"

"She did it," replied Vernon, his eyes filled with tears of joy. "The credit is all hers, not mine. It was she who inspired my soul with the love and tenderness and enthusiasm that I have given to that canvas. She is to be my wife. You shall see her often, *cher maître*, and she will love you as I love you!"

XX

TOWARD the close of the Van Zant's stay in London not a day passed without Merwyn seeing them. It did not occur to him that this intercourse meant anything more than the mere carrying out of his compact with Mrs. Van Zant. The fact that he had absolutely neglected his other friends had not entered his head. He had undertaken to accomplish a certain thing, and he went at his appointed task with his usual determination to be successful.

Eleanor's manner had so far changed that he had good reason to feel that his efforts were productive of satisfactory results. This task of leading a girl from the land of shadow and sorrow to one of sunshine and gladness was both interesting and novel to him. That the journey was not an easy one none knew better than he. His solicitude and attention were ideal. He was ever on the alert to scent danger ahead, and was careful to see that no attempt was made to proceed too far at any one time. This watchfulness, and his exemplary discretion, prevented any reverse tendencies that would otherwise have been sure to retard his progress.

Merwyn could see the light afar off, and was convinced that each day was taking Eleanor nearer to it. The end of the journey, however, was not reached when the Van Zants left London, and lo, Eleanor was gone as in the twinkling of an eye. He had been deeply interested in her case, as was his custom whenever he undertook to compass any end; but just how far this personal interest had gone he had had no idea until her departure.

It seemed to him as if something had literally dropped out of his life. He wondered how it was that his clothes still fitted him. He stepped on a scale, expecting to find that he had suddenly become a featherweight, but to his surprise he discovered that he had suffered no perceptible loss of *avoirdupois*.

"I don't like the affair to break off in this way," Merwyn said to himself.

"When I start in to do a thing, I want to see it through to the end, and then I am satisfied. As it is now, all my efforts to aid Miss Clayson are as good as wasted. I know how it will be. She'll settle down to work now that she is in Paris, and, left alone to herself, she'll go back to the old gloom again. I don't see why the Van Zants got frightened the first minute this fellow Ruddington appeared in London. It strikes me that it's just as well to have a little independence. What is there so terrorizing about Ruddington, that they should flee from him? He's the very last man that would drive me. I wish Mrs. Van Zant had never said anything to me about Miss Clayson. All that I've done will amount to nothing. I went into the experiment in good faith, and naturally I became interested in seeing the girl out of her difficulties. She appealed to my sympathy. But what's the use of thinking about it? There's nothing to be gained now by going over it all again. Well, I'll be mighty careful in the future what sort of schemes I get into!"

Merwyn drew a long breath that sounded like a very, very deep sigh. The flavor of his cigar did not please him, and he threw it away and went out for a walk. The air was filled with a heavy brown fog, and his depression increased as he became chilled from the dampness.

"This dreary, dirty weather is enough to drive one mad," he said with a shudder. "I wish I were back in America, where there's sunshine and pure air. I think I've had about enough of this European business. There's only one place for a man to live, and that place is New York."

The days went by, and Merwyn's spirits showed little or no improvement. He tried to recover the old gayety that he had previously upheld as the ideal life of happiness, but his heart was not attuned to it. Finally he began to regard himself with alarm, fearing that he was ill. He had never thought of Eleanor in any other sense than as a girl whose heart had been wrung with sorrow, and whom he had undertaken to help; but it struck him as strange that she should come into his thoughts so often, now that she was gone and the experiment was practically at an end.

What a big, lonely, cheerless city London had become! His heart ached for companionship, but there was no companionship in all the social circles to which he was

welcome. Often his mind went back to the strange fancy of that night when he saw himself as the protector of a sweet child. How vivid the scene was before his eyes, and what a delicious sense of pleasure he always found in the touch of her fair little face against his! He could feel her breath upon his cheek, and gradually she became almost a living reality to him.

Occasionally the idea possessed him that his depression was due entirely to Ruddington's presence in London. Merwyn had never got over the feeling that there was some fatality in his encounters with the man. He was not at all superstitious on any other subject than this; but now that Ruddington had followed him to London, as he fancied, he was conscious of a vague dread of something, he knew not what, that in some way concerned himself and Eleanor's rejected suitor.

The Van Zants had been in Paris for ten days when one afternoon Merwyn received a dispatch from Vernon, saying:

Margaret and I are engaged, the picture is finished, and I am the happiest man in the world.

"I'm glad, old fellow!" said Merwyn to himself. "I am indeed glad, and you are the happiest man in the world, you say. Well, I can't dispute the claim with you now. I thought once that I was the happiest man in the world, but something is wrong with me—this climate, very likely. Perhaps I need a change, or perhaps it is the haunting presence of that fellow Ruddington. I was all right up to the time he came here—never in better spirits in all my life."

Merwyn kept the telegram before his eyes and read it over and over again. It seemed to possess a strange fascination for him.

"So Vernon is really engaged," he reflected. "I'm sure he is very happy, as he says, but I can't understand it. Vernon in love—and he never cared a fig for girls, while I simply adored them. Well, this is an odd old world. The unexpected is always happening. I must wire him;" and he wrote the following dispatch:

Warmest congratulations to yourself and fiancée—more congratulations on the completion of your picture. I will be with you to-morrow and felicitate you personally.

Merwyn had received by the morning mail an invitation from the Van Zants to

spend Christmas with them. Something had been said about this when they left London, but he did not consider that he had actually promised to do so, and he had not been in the mood for merrymaking. He had written to them just before Vernon's dispatch came, but the letter had not been posted, and he lost no time in substituting another in its place, accepting the invitation.

Now that he was committed to spend the Christmas holiday with friends, he bestirred himself to select appropriate remembrances for the occasion. His purchases were generous, and were guided by his usual good taste. He was one who never half did anything, neither was he given to overdoing.

The shopping, and the thought of giving pleasure to others, wrought a wonderful change in Merwyn. Instead of shrinking from the idea of spending the holiday in Paris, he could hardly wait for the hour of his departure.

XXI

MERWYN arrived in Paris late in the afternoon of the 24th, and drove at once to the Hôtel du Rhin, on the Place Vendôme, where the Van Zants had rooms, stopping on the way thither at a florist's, to complete his holiday purchases. When he was dressed for dinner, Vernon joined him, and after hearty congratulations from Merwyn, the two proceeded to the apartments of the Van Zants.

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Merwyn," said Margaret Van Zant. "Our jollification would not have been complete without you."

"You are very good to say so, and I am delighted to be here," replied Merwyn. "This is something I have been hoping for, Miss Van Zant—this opportunity of congratulating you," he went on. "You know I wrote to you once that Harley is the best fellow in all the wide, wide world."

"And you know what I wrote to you about the sweetest girl in all the wide, wide world," she laughingly answered.

"Yes, I remember well, and here she is," replied Merwyn, coloring, and taking Eleanor's hand. "I am very glad to see you again, Miss Clayson," he added, less at ease than ever before in his life, though he knew not why.

"We were afraid you might not be able to come, Mr. Merwyn," said Eleanor.

"If only you knew how glad I am to be

here with you, you couldn't imagine that I would remain in London alone."

This deepened the flush on Eleanor's face. Merwyn was sure that he had never seen her look so pretty before.

"Would you have been quite alone had you remained there?" she asked.

"Yes, quite alone."

"I'm very glad you are with us," she said softly, and her eyes fell before his.

Merwyn's heart thrilled with a new and delightful sensation.

"London has been very dreary since you went away," he replied, hardly knowing what he was saying.

"I'm just a little bit glad if you really did miss us."

"You will never know how much I missed you," answered Merwyn, and there was an emphasis on the word "you" which forced Eleanor to believe that he meant her in particular.

Merwyn's spirits had rebounded. After almost two weeks of deep depression they were now at the other extreme. These few words with Eleanor had set him aglow with animation, and at dinner he was the life of the table. It was a merry Christmas Eve for them all. There were many pretty remembrances for each member of the party. Merwyn had feared that Eleanor's presents would be few compared to Margaret's, for the latter had with her her family and her *fiancé*. He did as much as good taste would allow to remedy the inequality by making several purchases for Miss Clayson. She received them with undisguised pleasure.

On her part she had realized her indebtedness to Merwyn for the kindness he had shown her in London, and as a token of her gratitude she had bought for him several dainty novelties, such as only a woman's eye can select. Vernon and the Van Zants gave him more expensive presents, but these dainty gifts from Eleanor were priceless in his eyes. All were children again on this night before Christmas, and as happy as the small boy with his trinkets direct from the hands of old Santa Claus.

The eyes of the chaperon were less vigilant on this occasion of good cheer. During the following day Vernon and his *fiancée* lost no opportunity to be by themselves, and thus Merwyn and Eleanor were frequently alone together. They talked of her progress in art, of Paris, of the theaters, and of the little things that go to make up

agreeable conversation. No matter how trivial the subject, it was not without interest, for there was a sympathy between them that lent a strange charm to every word spoken. Merwyn told her something of his life, of his work in London, of his ambition and his aims. Eleanor followed him with breathless attention and with wonder and admiration.

That night Merwyn went back to London. It required no little will force to tear himself away from Paris, but the next day would be Saturday, and he must be at his post to get off his dispatch for the Sunday edition of his paper. On his way home his mind was filled with thoughts of Eleanor. Again and again he went over their hours together. He saw the pleasure that shone in her eyes on receiving his gifts, and wondered if she realized how happy her remembrances had made him.

"She can never know," he reflected. "I could hardly comprehend it myself. It was so sweet of her to think of me, and so unexpected. I wish I could have taken her choicer presents, but it wouldn't have been good form—no, it wouldn't have done. I'm glad that Vernon remembered her so handsomely. He's a splendid fellow, and I'll not forget his kindness to Eleanor. How happy he is, the dear old fellow, and Margaret—I never saw anything like it. Not a bit silly, either of them—just intoxicated with joy, that's all. They were a study for a novelist, upon my soul they were, and it did me good to see them; but it's infernally odd—Vernon in love! I wonder just what it is that so takes hold of a man! It's lucky for Margaret, though, that Vernon fell in love with her when he did. If he had waited till Miss Clayson came over here, no other girl would have had a proposal from him. He would have been on his knees to her long before this, and it would have shown his good taste. As Margaret said of her, she is the sweetest girl in the world, and so companionable, too—yes, that's it, companionable—gives one such a restful, comfortable feeling to be with her."

The week between Christmas and New Year's Day is a dull one anywhere. To an American in London it is particularly dull. The following brief note will suggest how Merwyn found it:

MY DEAR VERNON:

This beats anything I ever saw for stagnation. May the Lord spare me from ever spending an-

other holiday week in London! If you have any interest in me, old man, do trump up some excuse for inviting me over to Paris. I want to see you and Margaret again. Your happy faces are an inspiration to me. Can't you arrange some outing for us, with Miss Clayson as one of the party?

You can't imagine how stupid I have found this town since returning from the good cheer of Christmastide. The contrast has been something wicked. I feel as if I never want to see London again.

Say nothing to any one of this letter.

As ever,

TOM.

"Humph!" exclaimed Vernon, smiling broadly as he read the letter. "Merwyn in love! Well, well, this is rich! He's the fellow who would never tie himself down to one girl, as he put it; but I knew it was only a question of time after Eleanor came over here. I wonder that he has held out so long. So sweet a girl as she would have won the heart of any other man in half the time. Well, I owe all my happiness to Merwyn, and he shall have my help. It was he who introduced me to Margaret, and how I did rave against going to that theater party! It is all so odd—seems sometimes as if something outside of ourselves directs our lives in spite of us."

Here is Vernon's reply to Merwyn's note:

MY DEAR BOY:

I am mighty sorry you have found London so dull. You should have come back here Monday, as I urged.

You certainly do not need an excuse to visit me, but since you desire one it shall be as you wish. Come over Sunday afternoon and remain as long as you can be away from your office. I will arrange something to make it interesting for you. The days are all brightness with me now, old fellow.

Yours,

HARLEY.

It was the second day of Merwyn's visit, and he and Eleanor were alone.

"I have a confession to make to you, Miss Clayson," he began hesitatingly. "I have been guilty of entering into a conspiracy against you."

"Against me?" Eleanor repeated.

"Yes, against you, but the motive was to help you, not to injure you."

"Why, Mr. Merwyn, what do you mean?"

"I must tell you the story, and then you will understand," said Merwyn, gaining confidence, now that a beginning had been made. "When I first saw you in London, I was struck by the change in you, and

afterward I learned from Mrs. Van Zant what had saddened your life. Your interests could not have been more sacred to her had you been her own daughter. Her heart was pained at your depression. She feared that unless your thoughts were diverted from your sorrow, the effect on your health would be serious. With a view to helping you she took me into her confidence, and asked me if I would undertake to interest you. The idea struck me as an odd one, but I assured her I would gladly do anything that promised to be of benefit to you. Each day the experiment interested me more; each day you interested me more. I was delighted to see the color coming back to your cheeks; but little did I realize the extent to which you filled my thoughts until you were gone. Then life suddenly became unbearably dreary. I was with you again for Christmas, and the world was bright once more, and I was never so happy. I went back to London and into the gloom. It all began in acting; it has ended in my living the part I attempted to play." There was an instant's pause, and then Merwyn added softly: "Eleanor, I love you sincerely, deeply!"

"Love me?" repeated Eleanor, bewildered at this sudden declaration.

"Yes, love you, as I never knew one could love till I met you."

"You can't realize what you are saying," she answered, hardly believing her own senses.

"Yes, I realize perfectly."

"And you know of my affair with him?" she asked, her head bent low.

"Yes, I know, and I love you all the more for the courage you have shown. Tell me that you have learned to love me while winning my love—tell me this, Eleanor, and my happiness will be complete!"

Eleanor hesitated. Each instant was an hour to Merwyn.

"I do care for you," she said, finally breaking the awful suspense, and her tones were so low that he could scarcely catch the words. "I care for you very much," she repeated; "but my father and mother—they know nothing of this. I cannot say more—no, no!"

She buried her face in her hands, her whole body convulsed by the force of her emotion. Merwyn's heart almost ceased beating. He had hoped for more than this, and was staggered by her words.

For a time both were silent, save for the

sobs from Eleanor's lips. The conflict between love and duty filled her soul with anguish. Merwyn saw and pitied her and loved her more tenderly, more deeply than before, now that the first sharp pangs of disappointment were over. He began to appreciate her position, and tried to soothe her, revealing a phase of his nature that completed the conquest of her heart.

XXII

ELEANOR wrote to her father and mother of Merwyn's proposal, and of her deep love for him. Mr. Clayson was amazed. Mrs. Clayson was scarcely less shocked. Both were sorely troubled.

"She is barely out of one affair when she gets involved in another!" cried the anxious father.

"It isn't safe to have her away from us," said Mrs. Clayson.

"If only we had gone with her, this wouldn't have happened," returned Mr. Clayson.

"We should not have let her go without us."

"No, we should not. It's our fault, wife, more than hers," agreed Mr. Clayson, his brow knit in thought. "Our fault," he repeated; "and now we must get her out of this affair as we got her out of the other one."

"But this man might make a desirable husband for Eleanor," returned Mrs. Clayson. "Isn't it unfair to condemn him until we know more of him?"

"I know enough of him already from what Eleanor wrote. He's not the sort of man I want for a son-in-law. Imagine a newspaper chap—a writer—coming here as the manager of all my property!"

This discussion resulted in Mr. Clayson telegraphing to New York for passage for himself and his wife on the first steamer for Europe. They arrived in Paris on the 27th of January, and lost little time in getting at the object of their sudden visit to the French metropolis.

Merwyn, meanwhile, had fallen into serious trouble. It came about by the publication in the *Metropolis* of a dispatch that he had cabled over, which made startling revelations concerning certain conspicuous Americans abroad. The appearance of the story raised a fierce storm of indignation, not only from the principals, but from their friends in America as well. Several libel suits were immediately instituted against

the *Metropolis*, and denials and denunciations were freely published by the rival newspapers.

Merwyn, of course, was responsible for all this, and when he found that there was no truth in the story he had sent to his paper, his apology was manly and complete. The publishers of the *Metropolis* were naturally incensed that they should have been so imposed upon. They were at an utter loss to understand how their London correspondent, with his cool head and his knowledge of the world, had been the dupe of false information. Their demand for an explanation was promptly answered by Merwyn, who put the matter in such a light that they could not reasonably censure him without further knowledge. They immediately sent a representative to London to investigate the whole affair, giving him power to terminate Merwyn's contract if he thought it advisable.

Merwyn was too good a newspaper man to send in news of this character without feeling tolerably sure that it was correct. He had not been hasty in this matter. Fully three weeks had been consumed in arranging for the publication of the story. He was alive to the interests of his paper, and since it was the custom of American journalism to seize upon everything in the nature of a social sensation in high life, he was not one to be outdone. He had no desire to make matters of this sort public; but since they were sure to appear in print somewhere, he preferred to secure a "beat" on his competitors.

Now that the falsity of the story had been established, Merwyn saw that he had been made the victim of a carefully laid conspiracy. The question was, was it the author's purpose to injure him, or simply to use him as a means of injuring the persons who had been slandered?

"This is the first thing to determine," Merwyn said to himself, and at once began a thorough investigation.

When the matter came to the ears of the Van Zants, they immediately recalled the anonymous letter that had been sent to Eleanor, presumably by Ruddington. They told Vernon of the incident, and he at once asked Eleanor about it. She gave him the letter, remarking that she had not mentioned it to Merwyn, not wishing to worry him.

"This is an important clew," returned Vernon. "I will take it with me, with

your permission, and go over to London tonight. I shall remain there so long as I can be of any service to Merwyn."

In her heart Eleanor thanked him with profound gratitude, and she put into words all that her position would permit. Merwyn's proposal was not known to Vernon or the Van Zants. She deeply sympathized with her lover, but she dared not let her friends see how great her anxiety was. She felt sure that Ruddington was in some way connected with the conspiracy, and she held herself responsible, believing that it was on her account that Merwyn had been made the target for Ruddington's ill will.

"Here's something that may throw light on the situation," said Vernon, handing Merwyn the anonymous letter.

Merwyn read it with compressed lips and bitter indignation.

"I wish I had known of this before!" he said.

"Do you imagine it has any bearing on your affair?" asked Vernon.

"The man who wrote that letter is capable of doing almost anything that would injure me," answered Merwyn. "This is positive evidence that some one has a bitter enmity against me. I am satisfied now that the object of putting that false story in my hands was to injure me, not the people scandalized. This is at least one point gained. It will help me to unravel the mystery and find out the author of the villainy."

"Have you no idea who he is?"

"No, none whatever. I can't understand how any one could do such an outrageous thing simply to spite me."

"Miss Clayson suspects Ruddington."

"Ruddington!" exclaimed Merwyn, startled at the mention of his *bête noire*.

"Yes," replied Vernon, and he told Merwyn of the two letters Eleanor received from Ruddington on the day she left London for Paris.

Merwyn's color had left him. He paused before replying.

"I can't understand it," he said finally. "You know my feelings when that fellow first came in contact with me. I talked with you about it one night, and you laughed at me. There's something in it so strange and uncanny that it makes my blood creep. I had not thought of him in connection with this outrage, but this letter and the circumstances suggest that he is the man."

"It looks reasonable," answered Vernon. "It isn't difficult to understand his motive for wishing to discredit you."

Merwyn colored. He had said nothing to Vernon of his love for Eleanor, but now he told his friend the whole story.

"This delights me, old fellow!" said Vernon. "I'll do all I can to help you, and I'll guard your confidence faithfully."

The anonymous letter lay before Merwyn. He picked it up suddenly and began studying it, as if trying to identify some one's handwriting. This was precisely what he was doing, only the writing was that of a machine instead of a pen. Vernon watched him, and wondered much, as he saw the light of hope in Merwyn's eyes.

Presently, without saying a word, Merwyn went to his desk and took out a bundle of papers, from which he extracted a typewritten sheet. He minutely compared it with the letter, and then passed the two to Vernon, saying:

"Are they not the work of the same machine? Just notice the peculiar spacing wherever the letters 'e' and 'i' come together. Also the 'n' and the 'y' are out of alignment, the one being too high and the other too low; but the most striking thing—the thing that led me to make the comparison—is the font of the type itself. It has a different face from that of most machines used here in London. The letters are more condensed. It's an American machine, I think, of a new make, and but few of them are in use over here."

"It would be marvelous if you could trace this note after all," replied Vernon.

"I know who wrote this paper for me," resumed Merwyn, worked up to a high state of excitement. "The man who did it is in a place on Oxford Street. He does whatever work he can pick up from the public, and has done a good deal for me at different times. He's both a stenographer and a typewriter."

"Let's go to him at once," said Vernon, and the two were quickly on their way to the man of the labor saving device.

"You did this writing for me, I believe," said Merwyn, producing the paper that he had taken from his desk.

"Yes," answered the man. "I remember it well."

"I was sure you did it because of the peculiarity of the print."

"Yes, it's an odd type—more condensed and clearer cut than most, I think."

"I've noticed that," answered Merwyn. "I don't know of any other machine over here like it."

"I think there are only a few—in fact, I don't know of any except in private use."

"I had that idea," answered Merwyn. "It's peculiarly fortunate for me, for I want you to identify some writing. This is it;" and he handed the man the anonymous letter.

The latter flushed when his eye had passed over a few lines.

"I see you recognize it," said Merwyn, casting a quick glance at Vernon.

"Yes, I can't deny it," was the answer. "A man came in here and asked me to write it for him, and I wrote it. He paid me and went out. It's not my business, you know, to look into people's motives."

"Certainly not. You did nothing wrong; but this letter has reference to me, and I came to you to learn something about the author of it. Can't you recall his looks? Did he seem to be an Englishman or an American?"

"I should say he was an American," replied the stenographer, and then gave a description which was definite enough to satisfy Merwyn and Vernon beyond question that Ruddington was the man.

XXIII

MR. CLAYSON spent a couple of days in New York before sailing for Europe. A portion of this time was devoted to looking up Merwyn's record, and to gathering information as to his character and reputation. Every one who was consulted spoke of him as an exceptionally clever newspaper man, and all comments save one were favorable to him. The one exception was an admission of his extravagance, and in Mr. Clayson's eyes this was quite enough to outweigh all the other virtues attributed to Merwyn.

The rich paper manufacturer was in no sense a mean man. He knew the pleasure of helping others, and gave generously of his wealth; but to him giving was one thing and unwarrantable extravagance was quite another. He could not look upon the latter with any degree of tolerance. The fact that Merwyn spent all his earnings, and more, condemned him outright in the mind of Mr. Clayson. Then, too, there was the favorite kinsman, in whom he saw the man who exactly fitted his fancy as the future manager of the great Clayson mills.

On his arrival in England almost the first thing he saw in a London newspaper was an account of the alleged society scandal that had appeared in the *Metropolis*. This sort of journalism was roundly denounced by the more conservative British paper.

"It must be the work of that fellow Merwyn," said Mr. Clayson to his wife, and he read aloud to her the caustic comments of the London journal. "A fine man he would be for a son-in-law! Think of him as the husband of our only child and the manager of all our property, wife!"

Thus prejudiced against Merwyn, Mr. and Mrs. Clayson arrived in Paris prepared vigorously to oppose his suit for the hand of their daughter. Their success in breaking off the affair with Faulkner Ruddington led them to believe that they could easily persuade Eleanor of the folly of this second attachment.

Their reasoning could not have led them further astray. The conditions in the one case were not the conditions in the other. Ruddington had won Eleanor's love, not because of any worth he possessed, but through her girlish sentimentality and the influences that were about her at the time. Merwyn, on the other hand, had qualities that could not fail to inspire genuine admiration. He was well educated, was one of the cleverest men in his profession, and was a gentleman with a good deal of social polish.

Eleanor, too, was no longer the thoughtless, sentimental child. She had learned to think, taught by a bitter lesson of sorrow. Such teaching is rarely without good effect, and it had had good effect on Eleanor. She had not allowed herself to fall hastily in love with Merwyn. She had fought against the sentiment that brought a new joy into her heart, displacing the old sadness, but the fight had proved in vain. Her love was stronger than her will, and yet she would not at once commit herself to Merwyn when he told her of his love for her. She wanted to avoid the repetition of a mistake that nearly wrecked her life, and she laid the matter before her father and mother.

They were with her now—they had come all the way from America to dissuade her from the attachment she had formed for Merwyn. Their opposition was determined, but she was as unyielding as they. "I am no longer a child," she said.

"Should I not be allowed to think for my-

self? You want me to be happy, but could I be happy as the wife of one for whom I have no love?"

"We have not asked you to marry any one," answered her father. "We only want you to avoid making a fatal mistake—to avoid marrying a man who could not support you—who is head over heels in debt."

"But Mr. Merwyn could support me. He has told me about his affairs. He has property enough to pay all he owes; and as to his income, if we could not live on eight thousand dollars a year, it would be a pity!"

"He earns enough, I know, but what good does it do him? He spends it all, and more, too."

"It does not follow, though, that he would continue to waste his money if he were married."

"Very true; neither does it follow that because he has been earning eight thousand dollars he will continue to do so. If I were running a paper, and one of my men sent me the sort of news that Mr. Merwyn sent the *Metropolis*, I wouldn't keep him on my pay roll very long!"

Eleanor's face flushed.

"He is fully capable of earning quite as much outside of the *Metropolis*," she answered. "Besides, when the truth comes out, you'll find that he wasn't blamable in the matter of that dispatch."

The discussion continued, and incidentally Mr. and Mrs. Clayson learned for the first time that Ruddington was in Europe. Eleanor showed them the two letters she had received from him, and told them of the anonymous note reflecting on Merwyn. She told them, too, of her suspicions that Ruddington was in some way responsible for Merwyn's present difficulty.

The revelation annoyed Mr. Clayson very much, and made him feel an interest in Merwyn that hitherto had not existed; but he was still firm in his opposition to Eleanor's choice.

He made this plain to Merwyn himself in an interview which took place between them a few days later. His argument was pretty nearly the same that he had urged with Eleanor. Merwyn pleaded guilty to the charge of a too free expenditure of money in the past, but was confident that this would have no bearing on the future. Mr. Clayson was unyielding, outwardly, and sent Merwyn away without hope, though deep down in the older man's heart

there was a feeling of regret. He had seen Merwyn several times, and liked him in spite of himself.

Mrs. Clayson had already been won over, but this counted for naught against her husband's stronger will. Eleanor said little. Her love for Merwyn was only intensified by parental opposition. She did not, however, put herself in direct antagonism to her father, and seemed to accept the inevitable passively.

XXIV

HAD Merwyn known of the anonymous letter assailing him, he would probably have been on his guard against any possible conspiracy such as that of which he had been made the victim. He knew of no enemies—of no one who would deliberately attempt to ruin him. There was nothing to awaken his suspicions. Had Eleanor given him the letter before, it would have been different. It would have been better had she done so, though her motive in keeping it from him was justifiable and praiseworthy. As things were, the discovery of its writer's name had come too late to save Merwyn.

The representative from the home office of the *Metropolis* had arrived, and at once set to work, in conjunction with Merwyn, to trace the author of the fraud; but this was not an easy thing to do. The story had come to Merwyn in a roundabout manner, but through a channel which he regarded as trustworthy. There was nothing unusual in this. Revelations in social life not infrequently reach the public eye by an extremely circuitous route. A detective had already been employed on the case, and now, with Merwyn's new theory to work on, he secured evidence that left no moral doubt of Ruddington's guilt; and yet of direct testimony there was not sufficient to fix the legal responsibility upon him.

The agents through whose hands the story had come, persisted in their refusal to reveal the source of their information, alleging that it was only under a compact of secrecy on this point that they had been allowed to give the matter to the press. They justified themselves by the assertion that a disclosure of names would only cause a still more serious scandal.

This, to say the least, was very vague and highly unsatisfactory to Merwyn. He could not free himself of responsibility without fixing it clearly on another, and that he had failed to do.

The *Metropolis* representative, himself a practical newspaper man, came to the conclusion that Merwyn had exercised customary care and discretion. Notwithstanding this exoneration, Merwyn chafed at his inability to make the public see the matter in its true light, and burned with desire to show up the real culprit. It was while he was in this state of mind that Mr. Clayson sent him away without hope. He was a man of impulsive temperament. His spirits were either very high or correspondingly low. Usually his heart was light and gay, but now it was heavy as lead. His mind was filled with a conflict of emotions. He had been refused the hand of the girl he loved, and he smarted under the criticism of the press. For all this he held Ruddington responsible.

One day, while thus depressed and embittered, Merwyn learned that Ruddington had commented very freely, before a number of Americans, on the fact that such scandalous news should be sent to New York papers. He said a good deal on this subject, and in an indirect way suggested more, reflecting, of course, on Merwyn.

Merwyn, fired with anger, vowed that he would settle matters personally with Ruddington, since the law could not reach him. That night he started out in search of his detractor. After visiting a number of places he found him at the Criterion.

"I have a matter to settle with you, Mr. Ruddington," said Merwyn, coming to the point at once, and without any attempt to conceal his anger. "Shall it be done here, or will you name a place?"

"You must be mistaken in your man," replied Ruddington. "You and I, sir, have nothing in common."

"I have made no mistake in my man—you may be quite sure of that. By way of jogging your memory I will ask you to pass your eye over this paper."

Ruddington took the anonymous letter in his trembling hand, and had scarcely read a line when he staggered, white with fear.

"I see you recognize it," Merwyn went on. "You recognize your dastardly thrust at me!"

"Be careful what you say, sir! I warn you that I am a Ruddington, and you should know what that means, sir!"

"A Ruddington!" repeated Merwyn contemptuously. "A cowardly scoundrel, that's what you are!"

"You shall hear from me for this insult!" cried Ruddington, beside himself with fear and anger. "I refuse to pass another word with you, sir;" and he turned his back upon Merwyn and beat a hasty retreat.

On the following day a small, wiry man of nervous manner, evidently a Frenchman, appeared at the London office of the *Metropolis*. He brought a letter from Ruddington, challenging Merwyn to give him what he termed "the satisfaction due to a gentleman."

In his present mood, Merwyn was as ready to fight a duel as to do anything else.

"If I should be killed," he mused, "it would end all this trouble—no more heart-ache—no more disappointment. Life must end sooner or later, and why not now? There is no more happiness for me. I love a girl who cannot be my wife. She will understand it all, and will perhaps be happier with some other man. I hope she will be happy, whatever happens to me. It's no use to go on in this way. That man haunts my life. There's a terrible fatality about all this that I cannot understand. I shall never understand it. Everything has gone wrong with me lately. He may kill me, but I won't kill him. No, I'll take good care of that. No life shall be on my conscience. This thing is all very foolish, I know. If Eleanor could be my wife, I would be the last man to fight a duel, but now—well, it may as well be. It may come out all right. It will stir up something of a sensation if I am killed. I wish I could be here to write it up for the *Metropolis*!"

He carefully concealed his purpose from his friends. Even Vernon, whose advice he might naturally have sought, he did not consult, preferring to shield him from any connection with a duel. His only confidant was a fellow journalist whom he had selected as his second. Through the latter an acceptance of the challenge was sent to Ruddington, naming pistols as the weapons.

XXV

A COUPLE of days later the dueling party, eight in number, met shortly before sunrise at a lonely spot on the French shore of the Channel, near Boulogne. The preliminaries were quickly arranged, and the principals took their places at the distance of thirty paces. It was agreed that the signal should be given by counting "one, two, three," and at the sound of "three" the

combatants were to raise their pistols and fire.

The dawn had scarcely broken. The air was damp and cold. In the gray, misty light, the men's figures seemed like weird specters. It was a solemn moment. The principals stood facing each other, pistols in hand, and presently the awful silence was broken.

"One—two—" Instantly a shot rang out. Merwyn staggered and fell. Ruddington had fired before the signal.

For a moment every one was struck dumb with horror. There could be no mistake of Ruddington's deliberate treachery.

"Disgraceful!" cried his second, the first to speak. "You have made me a party to a vile murder, you cowardly dog! You must fight me now! I'll never leave this field with such a disgrace on my head!"

The infuriated Frenchman was in dead earnest, and would listen to no attempted explanation from Ruddington. Seconds were chosen, and, while the surgeon was examining Merwyn's wound, a second duel was fought.

The Frenchman's aim was deadly. His first bullet inflicted a mortal wound on Ruddington.

Vernon had breakfasted, and was smoking his cigar. He was thinking of Merwyn, from whom he had just received a letter. It was written on the previous day, but gave no intimation of the approaching duel. Running through it, however, there was a pathetic strain of melancholy that impressed Vernon strangely.

"I'm sorry for him, poor fellow," he said, picking up the letter, and reading portions of it over again.

At this instant a telegram was brought in. Vernon took it, and his hand trembled as he tore open the envelope. He felt a peculiar dread as his eyes fell upon the message within.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Merwyn in a duel—shot through the lung—little hope—Ruddington dead! Oh, this is wicked, wicked news! I can't realize it—Merwyn, poor fellow, perhaps already dead, and I not with him!"

It was a terrible shock to Vernon. When he had calmed himself sufficiently, he drove hurriedly to the Hôtel du Rhin and went at once to Eleanor, to whom he broke the news as tenderly as possible. She was almost crazed by the shocking tragedy.

"All on my account!" she sobbed, struggling to control herself. "Maybe he is dying now — dead, perhaps — oh, no, no, that cannot be!" she cried.

Her father and mother tried to soothe her, but her heart was too full to be calmed.

"He must live," she said, starting up suddenly. "He must live for me. I will go to him and save him!"

"But, my dear Eleanor—" protested Mrs. Clayson.

"No, no!" interrupted her daughter. "I cannot be persuaded now. I will go at once!"

"Think what you are saying, Eleanor," implored her mother, half distracted. "It would not be proper!"

"I have already thought. Propriety shall not stand between me and his life," she answered. "Oh, it is all so cruel, so dreadful!"

"You shall go, my child, and we will go with you," said Mr. Clayson, conquered by sympathy for his daughter.

Merwyn's wound was too serious for the risk of crossing the channel. He had been taken to the cottage of a French peasant, and was resting as comfortably as could be expected when Vernon and Eleanor Clay-

son, accompanied by Eleanor's father and mother, arrived.

Vernon went alone to the room where Merwyn was. In a few moments he returned, his face beaming with hope.

"He is alive and conscious," he said. "You can see him now."

Vernon led the way, and the others followed. Eleanor caught a glimpse of Merwyn's pale face, as white as the pillow beneath it. His eyes met hers. She darted forward with a faint cry, forgetting all but her great love, and fell kneeling by the bed, her arms about the neck of him whom she was no longer afraid to acknowledge openly as "her king."

"Eleanor!" he murmured, and a smile came to his lips.

"Yes, and you must live for me," she replied. "I love you, and have come to nurse you back to life and strength!"

He was too happy to speak for a moment. Then he said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper:

"I shall get well now. Your love, dear, will heal this wound, as it has already healed the other wound that pained me most!"

There is no medicine like hope, no care like the tenderness of the hand of love.

THE END

FOR SAILORMEN ARE DIFF'RENT MEN

SINCE the first hollow log was pushed

A little from the strand,

Sailormen have been diff'rent men

From those that keep to land.

The hillmen have their rocky heights,

The herdsmen, dale and lea;

But the sailor has the trackless waste

Of the everlasting sea.

The herdsman's foot is on the earth

If roaming near or far,

But the sailor rides upon a board

That's guided by a star. . . .

The townsman has his home at eve,

The hillman has his herd—

But the sailor's sole companion is

The lonely, following bird.

Harry Kemp

The Cruise of the Dewdrop

WHEN A GENTLE YOUTH IS IN DIRE PERIL, WHAT BRAVE GIRL WOULD NOT LEAP TO HIS RESCUE?

By Perley Poore Sheehan

EVERY now and then Clarence Sibley would pause in whatever it was he happened to be doing—listen, look, catch his breath—with an uneasy sense that some one was watching him. Then, "Oh, fiddlesticks!" he would exclaim. "Don't be silly!" and he would go on with his work, whistling between his teeth or humming a little tune to keep his courage up to the mark.

There was plenty to do. The little home-made houseboat, Dewdrop, was almost ready to sail. Sugar, salt, self-rising flour—yes, there was plenty of this and plenty of that, everything in its right place.

"Now—where—in the dickens—" he began, with a glow of anger.

Ah, here it was: his indispensable housewife, with needles, thread, pins, buttons, thimble—enough, he fondly assured himself, for a long voyage. He placed the housewife in a particular drawer, with an air of decision as much as to say: "And that settles you!"

But once more his uncanny intuition was whispering of trouble.

He went over to the tiny window of the small cabin and peered out—long, this way and that—from behind the lace curtain.

There wasn't much to see—thickly fronded willows, mostly, and various slopes of black mud partly garmented with lush uncut grasses. But beyond this—revealing itself to Sibley by the eyes of imagination and memory—lay Millpaugh, the town he knew so well, and which he had now determined to flee.

He wondered—for the thousandth time, but more poignantly than he had ever done before—if he was going to regret it; regret the little boys and girls who called him "Fluffy"; regret the elders of these children who were only half in earnest when

they called him Clarence—his given name; regret Miss Morgan, the town librarian, and the other ladies like her, to whom—and to whom alone—he was "Mr." Sibley.

All the time that he was doing this he was making a willful effort to shut out of his thought the one person who bulked largest in his mental landscape. But no less willfully, this figure obtruded itself.

It was the figure of a large man, morose but righteous, somewhere upward of sixty, yet powerful and dominant; grossly masculine; hairy ears; well dressed in ugly clothes: Scroggs, in short—Mr. Elias Scroggs, ironmonger, dealer in secondhand stoves.

There was a film of tears in Sibley's eyes, however, as he stood there. He was glad that he had written the note he had before running away; he was glad that he had said none of the bitter things that had come into his thought.

After all, that harsh and taciturn old cheater, orthodox and dishonest, was all that had ever served Sibley as either father or mother. Certainly the Orphans' Home had been neither to him.

He could remember as if it had been Sunday before last—although it had been seven years ago—when Mr. Scroggs called for him at the Home.

"Prunes for supper that night," Sibley reflected aloud; "four of them. And, after that, the—spare stall!"

He had rather enjoyed sleeping in the stable. Rosie, the old mare—something of an orphan herself, most likely—had accepted him from the first on terms of social equality, not to say of intimate friendship. And then, there had always been rats and things—cats mostly, but now and then the godsend of a dog—something to love, to call his own.

It seemed to Sibley that his years had been a processional of dogs—mutts and strays, he was forced to avow—but all of them friendly, willing to remain on short rations, or even no rations at all except what they could rustle for themselves, until Mr. Scroggs intimated—by a toe in the ribs—that their visit was at an end.

"And blacking!" mused Sibley—again aloud as if to justify his defiance.

No more blacking of any kind—shoe or stove! Blacking, it struck him, suffused all the memories, even the brightest, of his last seven years, like an evil mist, smelly and unclean. Rusty stoves—all sorts, but mostly kitchen!

Black! Black! Black! When the weather was hot! When the weather was cold! And Mr. Scroggs's boots! And later—after poor Rosie died—Mr. Scroggs's economical "automobile."

"Call it that," Sibley remarked, with a smile back of his misty outlook.

It was at this juncture that a horror smote him—that he recalled those premonitions that had entered his mind a little while before. Suddenly his little houseboat was rocking, resounding to a heavy tread.

He caught the nightmarish vision of a stranger's bearded face at his little window.

II

WHEN the stranger spoke, it was with a husky voice—a voice, one would have said, that was permanently hoarse.

"You're Mr. —" the stranger had offered at the door.

"Sibley."

"Sibley," the stranger completed in that awful whisper. He grinned. He evidently attached no importance to the name. He was staring past Sibley at the dainty blue and white interior of the Dewdrop's cabin. It was this that pleased him, and made him grin. "Not bad," was his comment.

The voice, so Sibley was aware, matched the man—everything was wrong about him, heavy, abysmal. He wore a fuzzy old silk hat, a black frock coat and striped trousers, both of which were baggy and grimy. His cuffs and shirt front were somehow obvious and strangely too white, like false teeth of the cheaper sort.

"Celluloid," Sibley mentally observed, fascinated.

By contrast, his bristling beard suggested that blacking of unlovely memory. Moreover—so it seemed to Sibley, who himself

was rather undersized—the stranger bulked huge. This was especially so after the visitor had pushed his way into the miniature cabin of the Dewdrop and seated himself, largely, on the little blue and white bunk.

Sibley was in something of a whirl. It was several seconds before he could transfer his attention back to the stranger himself, from the suit case the man had brought with him. It was a shabby affair, of paper, brightly varnished to an arrant imitation of leather, oversized and fragile, torn and dented. It bore some faded white lettering, and was bound about with three different kinds of string.

The stranger had deposited this between his spraddled feet—carefully, Sibley noted; yet the contents had given out a muffled click and clank that to any one of sensibilities at all delicate was somehow sickening, to say the least.

"Scientific specimens," the stranger imparted hoarsely, with something of a challenge, catching Sibley off his guard. He continued to survey his host—savagely, one would have said—as he used a large and unkempt handkerchief to dry the inside of his collar, then the inside of his hat, then his face and head in general.

It was evident that the stranger was preparing for a session. He finally placed his hat, top down, on the floor. Into this he dropped his handkerchief, then, after a few moments of meditation, his cuffs.

"Set down," he rumbled to Sibley, who had continued to stand. He added: "Your wrigglin' makes me nervous." At least he was amiable. He proved this by his very next remark: "I'm goin' to show you where you can make a lot of money."

He gazed into space, a man of vision, while Sibley sank to the little locker under the window and sat there trying to be calm. "You've heard," the stranger went on, "of Thobo—Thobo the Great."

"No, sir," Sibley replied. The stranger glowered at him. "Yes, sir," Sibley corrected himself.

"I'm him," the other enlightened.

"Mr. Thobo?"

"Professor," the big man calmly returned. He went a bit oratorical: "As you see me now, I'm a monument to my own ambition. I was but ten years old when I left the smoke of my father's chimney. Well I remember that hour of parting. My sainted mother, she come to the gate and she says: 'Phil, my boy,' she says,

'never fergit, Phil, my boy,' she says. Says she—"

At this point he broke off in his narrative and ogled Sibley fiercely. "That's great," said Sibley.

"It's part of my spiel," Thobo confided with a certain reverence. "We'll get to that later. First, suppose we sample a little of my private stock."

He was already leaning over and grunting at the strings that bound his suit case. There was a certain modesty, not to say secretiveness, about him when he finally got the suit case open.

He fumbled around under the only partially raised lid—making ghostly clinks and clanks as he did so. But he came up with the bottle—a large bottle filled with a whitish fluid. He shook this and gazed at it fondly against the light.

"The old varnish," he teased, in his frayed and heavy voice. He pulled the cork with his teeth and wiped the gullet with the palm of his hand. "Embalmin' fluid," he offered jocosely, presenting the bottle to his host.

Sibley had a sensation of fire and aromatic suffocation. "That's great," he strangled as the stuff went down his throat.

Professor Thobo, now perfectly at ease, showed how a man should drink—plentifully, with gurgles, a smacking of the lips and a glance of appreciation for the damage done.

After that the visitor somehow completed his self-portrait, the autobiographical sketch of his spiel, but in a manner that was, so to speak, more impressionistic, jumpier, less in sequence:

"Run out of Dartown—the right pills to the wrong person—hick sheriff here in Millpaugh—'Whut kin you do?' says he. 'I kin shoot,' says I—Thobo the Great—you know, never in jail but twice—sheriff's old woman I was boardin' with—owed her sixteen plunks—owe 'em yet—He says, says he, 'I'm here,' he says, 'to see that the ladies of Millpaugh,' he says, says he, 'are pertected'—Hick sheriff, you know—wanted his cut in the sixteen plunks, y' understand—sorter hidin' here in the willers—seen you—knowed right off we was goin' to be partners—"

The truth thus came to Sibley unmistakably. But he didn't want to do this thing that the professor proposed, even if there might be a wad of easy money in it—to make the Dewdrop a floating "medicine

show"—"work the river towns"—"clean up on the rubes." And yet the professor was making it hard to refuse—wouldn't take "No" for an answer.

"'Clarence!'"—and Thobo the Great savored the name. "Have all the old janes passin' us the gravy! Best of it is, you look it, too. Good fer all sorts of grift! Work the churches—the Prodigal Boy—Oh, where is my wondering son—"

But this turn to the conversation, or monologue—and possibly, also, Thobo the Great's, so to speak, absent-minded toying with the bottle—threw him into a consideration of life in its less material aspects. He spoke of love and marriage and having children, the duties of parents.

"So y'ain't never been married?" he demanded loudly.

"I'm sorry to say"—although he wasn't sorry—"that I have not," Clarence replied.

"Y'ever been in love?" Thobo glowered with interest.

"I have not." There were subjects that were better left alone.

But if Thobo perceived the implied reproof, he covered his confusion by a recourse to the now impoverished bottle. He came back, conversationally, fortified and philosophical.

"Now," he said, with the air of one who generalizes and is going to do this carefully, "there's a funny thing about women. Some of 'em are good, an' then some of 'em ain't so good. I remember when I married me my second wife. Had me sold fer fair. Run off with a drummer, an' so I went back to my first wife. She don't look it, but she's the best of 'em all. Told her so, an' she like to bust a bed slat on me. Yes, we have our little ructions—give an' take—her a blue lamp, me with a handful of chin-chilla gone—no worse'n any other married couple. Sweet lil thing—all woman—"

"Any children?" Sibley asked.

"Six—or is it seven?—live wires—"

He continued to talk, but Sibley's thought was elsewhere. The afternoon was gone, night was coming on. This was to have been the night when, with prayer and fortitude and silent song, he would have sent the Dewdrop out of this muddy little creek onto the bosom of the Miami for her long cruise into the unknown South.

It all came back to him now—how he had slaved in secret to build this little houseboat. The "outside work" he had managed with weary hands and a heavy heart.

He had sold himself. It had been—for this!

Scroggs had never paid him anything. Scroggs's motto had been: "You wouldn't know what to do with money if I did give you some." But he had invested it in a dream—this barge of dreams, the Dewdrop, his very own.

It must have been out of this accumulated yearning that his swift inspiration and purpose were born. He had conceived a plan.

III

THE bottle was empty. And Thobo the Great was like a blundering and sleepy child as Sibley led him forth from the Dewdrop and onto the muddy bank. There, in other circumstances, Sibley might have left him.

But there were numerous shallows between this place and the open river. To set the Dewdrop on its way was going to take a lot of time and effort. In some manner he would have to forestall, therefore, the professor's interference.

It wasn't so bad, that place that had served Sibley himself for a home during the last seven years. The extra stall was a fair-sized room, neatly papered with pages from illustrated supplements of the more chaste variety. There was a camp bed here, a table, and a lamp.

Sibley had brought his guest into the dark stable secretly from the alley, and deposited him, partly by coaxing and partly by force, on the bed. He lit the lamp. His voice was gentle as he spoke his final words: "If you want anything—your suit case is right here beside you."

He quickly escaped through the door. Somehow or other the clanking of the suit case as he set it down had brought with it a recurrence of dread—something sickening—a vague premonition of terrible things—a grisly aftermath.

He fled—down through the alley to the slaughterhouse, across the vacant field back of the cemetery, down through the fringes of the swamp about Crawford's Run, thence to the jungle of "horse-weeds" and sunflower, poplar and willows, that shielded the muddy trough where the houseboat had come into being.

He was itching now to get the Dewdrop out into the open river. There was nothing to hinder him, he told himself—nothing but this and that mudbank that

he had already rather carefully measured with a yardstick. Hard work, though, he was finding this. The boat stuck. It yielded. It stuck again. He poled. He sweated. The Dewdrop came free.

There must have been a lapse of a couple of hours before he had the river in sight through the arching willows. He straightened up to rest himself. As he did so, he saw something that clamped his heart with icy fingers.

"Fire!" he gasped.

It must have been going on for some time—that infernal spectacle of a quivering red glow beyond the cemetery. It was evident that the fire was dying down rapidly. By the time that he reached the slaughterhouse the town was going back to bed. He could hear the scattered groups, keyed up by the unusual excitement, laughing and shouting as they dispersed.

But Sibley wasn't joining in the mirth. Colder, tighter than ever now, was that clutching terror at his heart. He was like a ghost as he came running up the alley. He was like a ghost when he finally stood there near the alley's end.

It was the one spot in the world which should have been the most familiar to him, yet it was strange—starkly, terrifyingly strange. There where the stable had stood there was nothing but a smoking vacuity—a vast bed of ashes over glowing embers.

"Thobo," he muttered. "Thobo did it!"

But he knew well enough who was guilty. He was—himself! Clarence Sibley! By what right had he brought a drunken man here to sleep—left him here with a lighted lamp?

He staggered away. No one had seen him. He was sick. He never guessed the full extent of the horror that had befallen, though, until the following night, when, after a distracted day, he came up to surrender himself.

There was a light in the Scroggs home. Then, through an open window, Sibley heard his master's voice, huge and vengeful, and astounding:

"Whut—I don't—understand is—why he burnt my barn down—ef he wanted to suicide."

"Suicide!" gasped Sibley in his thought, and began to shake.

There was a convenient syringa bush to mask him. He could see as well as hear: Scroggs himself, then two other figures, the Rev. Mr. Winton Oakley—a comparative

stranger in the town—and that other rather clerical figure, Oliver Jones, who spoke of himself in his advertisements as "The Furniture Man."

Mr. Jones had been stroking a rather long and yellowish mustache, with his eyes on Scroggs at an angle. He now spoke up:

"Would you want the funeral from the church?"

The Rev. Mr. Oakley here showed bright and sympathetic interest, but it was obvious that Mr. Scroggs, swelling and getting red, was going to "bust," as he himself would have put it.

"Fer a lot of charred bones?" he roared.

IV

THE Dewdrop was out on the river and already below the railroad bridge before Sibley even partly recovered himself.

They had raked the embers—found those things to which Mr. Scroggs had referred. *All of them!* Suicide! For there was that letter Scroggs had found under his front door, telling him that Clarence was going "on a long voyage." And lucky for Mr. Scroggs, at that; he was going to need that alibi to collect the insurance. He had said so himself.

Nothing, though, this was to the real thunder in Sibley's heart and brain. He had been, as it were, struck by lightning; the thunderbolt lingered in every tortured fiber of him. The thunderbolt was this and nothing else:

He—himself alone—was responsible for the death of a fellow human being.

As he sat there limply on the tiny open deck of his boat, which was now the front deck and then the after deck—for the little Dewdrop was slowly circling on the broad, dark current like Sibley's brain—he gradually became aware of the ancient blessing of the night.

Nothing happened. The river flowed on. There were stars in the sky. The trees reserved comment—with a certain sad and dignified sympathy, so Sibley felt.

There were two days of this—two days and two nights—days when he lay up with the Dewdrop safely nestled in some secretive green cove of the meandering river; nights of slow drifting and long communings with stream and sky, a combination of breathlike movement, of stars and star-reflections, when it was almost as if the Dewdrop were rolling over and over, bask-

ingly in the upper air—no telling which was river and which was sky.

It was by the end of the second day, when he was preparing without haste to get his craft into midstream again, that he discovered quite inadvertently what all this was, so to speak, preparing him for.

All day, off and on, he had taken cognizance of another covered bridge a mile or so downstream, and, at the farther end of this, the indications of a village. It had been a native, rowing past him in a flatboat with a shotgun sticking out over the prow, who had told him the name of the settlement down there.

"That," the native had said, "is whut some folks calls Hog Wallow."

"Hog Wallow!" Sibley repeated.

Somehow or other the name, or epithet, caused a slight tremor in his brain.

"Hog Wallow," the native confirmed.

"Sort of a nickname—give to it because that's what it looks like. But its real name—the name on the maps—is Dinwiddy."

"Dinwiddy!" said Sibley.

And then he knew. Dinwiddy—that had been the name painted on Professor Thobo's suit case:

P. T.—DINWIDDY

The native in the flatboat looked a trifle hurt—must have wondered what had come over the stranger. After a pause he rowed away. But Clarence was only dimly conscious of his going. It was Professor Thobo—Phil, my boy—Thobo the Great—who was before his eyes. It was that decomposed whisper of a voice that resounded in his brain.

The professor was alluding to home and wife and children—his first wife—best of them all—and the live wires, his offspring—six, or was it seven?

"Hog Wallow! The old woman and the kids!"

It was only toward morning that Sibley began to get a little relief. The dawn was breaking with the pink—and also something of the hushed music—of a great sea-shell. At least, he hadn't run away.

V

"THE dear departed!"—the words were Mrs. Thobo's—more correctly, Mrs. Thiebault's.

In her calmer moments, as Sibley was constrained to admit, Mrs. Thiebault was not devoid of logic. Nonetheless, her evol-

ing syllogism filled him with a shuddering horror. Boiled down, it amounted to this:

Thobo's gone;
You done it;
Therefore, you take his place.

She was a large woman, with small blue eyes of a singular directness. One of these was pouched rather more than its colleague, and still slightly discolored—reminiscent, doubtless, so Sibley reflected, of the professor's farewell. Even so, there was that about the lady to ratify the reference Thobo had made to give and take. Mrs. Thiebault had weight. This she supported mostly, with frank undisguisement, in a low rocking-chair.

Sibley was keeping his judgment in abeyance, but he couldn't help studying her. He had been studying her now for a week. He couldn't approve her predilection for going about in her stockinged feet. On the other hand she had taken, quite persistently, to wearing what her children alluded to as a "friz."

There was something touching about this—something that got to Sibley's heart such times as he meditated flight.

He was still sleeping on the Dewdrop, tied up under the Dinwiddy covered bridge; but the little boat was no longer the same. The Thiebault children and their playmates had worked the transformation. Here they caught and barbecued their catfish, played their innocent games of "cop" and "house" and "Robinson Crusoe." Seven Thiebaults—it was the professor's second guess that had been right.

"Fatherless," Sibley reflected; "and I'm to blame!"

Dinwiddy, or Hog Wallow, as the natives themselves preferred to call it, had a general store, and here, at Mrs. Thiebault's prompting, Sibley had been taken on as an extra clerk. There was one other clerk, a girl named Virginia Peters—a gentle creature, blond, awkward, but capable of handling a barrel or a hundred-pound sack of feed better than most men could have done it.

"What are you so sort of blue about?" Miss Peters had asked Sibley. It was at a time when the proprietor was absent and there happened to be no customers in the store.

Sibley sighed. He had come to count much on these moments with Virginia

Peters, even when their talk ran to nothing but nails, dried apples, or soap.

"I—I'm worried," he replied. The partial confession set his breast to heaving.

"Leave worry to the women," she counseled gently.

"But this—"

Sibley was tempted to tell Virginia everything. She also, he had learned, was an orphan, and alone in the world. There were moments, and this was one of them—

Then he stopped. Some one had entered. It was Freddie Thiebault, next to the youngest of the tribe.

"Do you wish to buy something, Freddie?" Sibley finally inquired with cold civility.

Freddie had stood there, barefooted, wriggling, visibly embarrassed. But now he harkened to that other voice, unidentified, that came from outside, telling him to—ah—go ahead. He squared himself, and recited something that he had learned by heart.

It was a mumble, but it acted on both Sibley and his fellow clerk, Miss Virginia Peters, like a lethal gas. It was the young lady who was the first to recover herself.

"What did he say?" she gasped.

The question was intended for Sibley, but it was Freddie who furnished the response. He repeated his words, more loudly, more distinctly, belligerently, even:

"You're my poppa, and I want some candy."

Sibley reeled. Instinctively the child had grasped the situation. This was a statement of it—the ethics, the full responsibility. There was no answer, nothing to be denied. And Sibley, consciously, was tottering, glassy-eyed, incapable of speech.

Freddie, acutely observant, must have perceived that victory was his. Like a good general he pressed his advantage by repeating the magic formula—more rapidly now, with a steady ascent of happy childish emotion.

Sibley fought his weakness. His movements were precise—even his mental processes were precise—as he charged himself a cent in his mind, and went over to the glass jar where the peppermint was kept.

Where was this child's father? Dead. By whose act? "Mine!" said Sibley.

"You even kept him from getting a decent burial," the inner voice went on. "They buried him, thinking it was you!"

He was taking more time than necessary to put the peppermint jar back in place.

"Murder!" he heard the whisper in his brain. "A life for a life!"

There had come a scramble at the door—hoarse undertones, fierce recriminations, then comparative silence broken by a childish treble repeating the words, with only a slight dialectal variation, that Freddie had spoken:

"Oorma poppa; wantum tandy!"

That was Brother speaking—youngest of the Thiebault flock, four, still without a name he could properly call his own. But valiant. First he had spoken his line just inside the door, where flight would have been easy. After that he had smiled at his backers a bit incredulously.

Then, perceiving that they were sincere, he had advanced, steadily. True, he was, so to speak, trailing part of his accouterment; but he kept up his battle cry, ever more eagerly, shortening it to the essential terms:

"Poppa—tandy!"

Sibley hadn't so much as taken his hand from the jar. He capitulated—another cent's worth.

Had he guessed the immediate effects of this he might have hesitated. Or would he have hesitated? Could he have hesitated? These children were fatherless—so he was telling himself; and who was responsible? Himself—himself alone!

Now the reserves had broken through and stormed the works—Stephen, Jr., a freckle-faced lad as big as Sibley himself, and enjoying the adventure hugely, slapping the whole pawful of peppermints into his mouth at once, and holding out his hand for more; Agnes and Sarah, who were almost ladylike until they saw that their manners were getting them nowhere in a mob like this; Jimmy, the clown of the family, who was always confining snakes in the Dewdrop's cabin; and Artie, who was his mother's pet because he wasn't bright.

They were all calling him "poppa"—howling it at him, each trying to make himself heard above the others; Agnes and Sarah, with an instinctive technique, trying to charm him, but blatting even louder than the boys when these tried to interfere with them.

Sibley's hands were sticky; they were sore from handling the jar and the sharp-cornered pellets of rock-hard sugar. But

the real source of his torture was not here—was not physical nor even immediate.

He was looking ahead.

This was not his present merely; this was his future.

This was going to be all of his life, hereafter and from now on—taking the place of "the dear departed"—as father to these children—as husband to—

"Har!"

The command came from the back of the store where Old Man Winters, the proprietor, had suddenly appeared. The Thiebault legionaries fled. And Sibley, feeling as one might who has been bled to the point of death, heard Miss Virginia Peters telling the boss that it was all her fault—that she had offered the poor little tikes a treat.

VI

HE didn't get out of the store until late that night. He found the world saturated with a velvet darkness under a late rising, malformed moon. He knew that in all probability Mrs. Thiebault would be "waiting up" for him, also most of the children.

No one in the Thiebault camp ever seemed to want to go to bed. They got sleepy, but wouldn't confess it, as if this were some sort of a shameful human frailty that were better concealed—sitting around owl-eyed and stupid, or abnormally cunning and quarrelsome, unwashed, unwilling to miss any savor of this thing called life.

His first thought was to go straight down to the Dewdrop—and push off. But he banished the thought. The temptation would be too great—already it was too great. To flee! To disappear! He turned away from the river blindly, miserably, up the deserted street.

But even Hog Wallow—scarred and inveterate foe to all beauty though it was—capitulated on a night like this. There were trees. There were crickets. There were odd bits of mistreated meadow that now, under cover of the darkness and as if furtively, revealed themselves as bowls of incense.

Sibley, wishing he were dead, still found consolation in this as he walked. He walked on and on. He was looking mostly at the sky.

But just when he had reached the last house of the dark street, he was suddenly

recalled to earth. It was here that Virginia Peters boarded. It was a swift awareness of Virginia's presence, then sight of her, that came to him as an apex to the wooing of his spirit by trees and stars.

The window was open, the room inside was brightly lighted, and Virginia, occupied about some task that engrossed her greatly, was alone. Sibley managed to make himself heard. Miss Peters, with no trace of alarm, only dim speculation, had gazed blankly through the window for a moment, then recognized him.

"Hello," she saluted, in turn. "What you doing around here at this time of night?"

"Just walking," he replied; whereupon her interest drifted back to the work she had had in hand.

"Nice gingham," Sibley remarked. "You'll look well in that."

"I will," she returned, with a spasm of despair, "if there's any of it left when I get through botchin' it up." She explained that she had started out to make herself a dress, but had run into dirty weather, as they say. She had a pattern, but she just naturally couldn't tell which was which.

And the man had said that three yards would be enough; but she just knew she was going to be one sleeve short—if she cut it this way; and if she tried to cut it that way, it was worser yet. Anyway, the figures ought to run up and down and not across. Honestly, she didn't know whether to cry or to cuss, she'd got to such a point—

All the time that he was listening to her, Sibley felt a subsidence of his own troubles, a replacement of them by Virginia's own.

"I can help you, if you'd like me to," he ventured timidly.

"To make a dress?"

He nodded. He came across with a confession: "That was another reason I ran away." He gulped. "They were making me do it—making a dressmaker of me. But if you—if you—"

She had opened the door for him, and he was in the room. She hadn't jeered at him at all. Rather, it was as if he had suddenly become her knight, and was going to deliver her from some dreadful dragon of circumstance.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," she whispered, awestruck as he attacked the gingham with the shears.

His secret was out. First, in pure friendliness, in strict secrecy, he had made dresses

for Miss Morgan, the librarian. It was she who had urged him to a correspondence course and inflamed his carefully concealed genius with books on costumes, modern and ancient.

Sibley told Virginia all about this while he worked. She didn't have anything to do but listen and try on. This she did, absorbed and watchful, touched with wonder, glowing with an admiration that was as wine to him for whom it was meant.

"Slip it on," he said at last, "before we run it up on the machine."

Miss Peters was transfigured when she came back from the next room. There for awhile Sibley himself had eyes for his handiwork only—"a tuck here"—"the sleeves could be shortened." But he was gradually aware that Miss Peters was looking at him with a changed expression.

"I bet"—she faltered, then caught her breath and plunged ahead again—"I bet there are a lot of girls and women like me—down the river—and, you know—if we went together—if you had me to go out and get the work—see that you were never imposed on—and it's nothing to be ashamed of—"

She was as strong as a man; but no lady angel could have been more feminine than she was right then—tears in her eyes, dawnlight in her face.

But Sibley choked: "I'm—not free!"

VII

VIRGINIA had insisted on "seeing him home a ways." She felt that he needed this escort. So did he. He had broken down. Heart and knees both, for a time, had deserted him. But not his principles. Now, slowly, out in the soothing night, he was erect again.

"A life for a life!"—his for Thobo's, in the only way that this was possible.

"Is that Mrs. Thiebault"—Virginia was glacial—"back of this?"

"Partly, but—"

"Are you," Virginia pursued very softly, "in love with her?"

Sibley stopped. He sought her hands. He called all his strength and courage into play. "It is you I love," he declared.

He was surprised to find her weak. He embraced her. "Virginia?" Her face was wet.

"Run away with me," she whispered, in panic, pleading. "I'll make you happy. I'll protect you. There's a preacher—six

miles down the river. We'll make money, live on the Dewdrop—later, we'll have a home."

"A home!"—a heavenly, a cosmic word; the word for something neither he nor she had ever known. Sibley closed his eyes.

"It wouldn't be right," he said.

They stood in panting silence. They kissed each other; but it was by way of saying farewell. The night about them had become the symbol for a greater night, lifelong, all-engulfing.

Then, slowly, they were aware of shrill voices in the night. They hadn't noticed it when they had turned a corner and come into close proximity to the Thiebault home. The open windows were light. From within there came excited pipings, squalls, accusations, recriminations.

"They're waiting for me," Sibley chattered nervously.

But Miss Peters quieted him.

"Thobo!" she whispered.

"He's dead," Sibley answered. "They found his—"

Then he stopped. He held his breath. He also had heard that unmistakable voice

that Virginia had already heard—a voice that was a huge and frayed and magnified whisper.

"His voice!" Sibley thrilled.

"Thobo!" she reiterated.

"Oh, God!" he gasped.

Themselves like ghosts, Sibley and the girl drew closer to the house. They heard the professor explaining that his "scientific specimens" had been lost with his suit case "when his hotel burned down." He had to come back because he was going to get—he knew where—another skeleton.

This, while Mrs. Thiebault made midnight coffee for him; and his offspring, wakeful and unrebuked, further relieved the tedium of the night.

Sibley, in sudden panic, seized Miss Peters, and found her arms responsive.

"Now, now!" he gasped.

Hand in hand they ran like frightened children—toward the river. The Dewdrop received them. They pushed away from this shore forever.

The little boat was like a magic chariot on a starry highway that would lead them to the sun.

THE WINTER GOES

Now, Heaven be thanked, at last the winter goes!

Tell me not of its beauty, ye who sing
Its arts of ice and storm, its sculptured snows,
Its white eclipse that knows not leaf or wing;
Unless, indeed, Death be a lovelier thing
Than Life with color in its cheeks and song
Upon its lips—Lo! the sweet voice of spring
Calls back the summer with its laughing tongue.

The world is warm again, the woods are green,
The rivers run, birds build, and squirrels leap,
And sun and shadow weave a swaying screen,
And blue-eyed flowers awaken from their sleep;
Soon will the meadow grasses be knee-deep,
Soon shall the rose fill all the afternoon,
And, when the evening star begins to peep,
The nightingale shall serenade the moon.

Lovers are back once more that fled like birds,
Stern-lipped December, heart to heart they lie,
And all the woods are full of whispered words;
Close hid in the deep bosom of July,
They dream that love like theirs can never die,
Nor summer end, nor ever fall the rose—
Let us make haste, Belovèd, you and I,
For, Heaven be thanked, at last the winter goes!

Richard Le Gallienne

"Pretty Bad"

IN THAT KIND OF LOVE WHICH IS EQUIVALENT TO WAR,
THERE ALSO ARE INNOCENT NONCOMBATANTS

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

ALLISON HOPE ran out of the balsam thicket, plunged down the rocky mountainside, caught her breath sharply, and clutched both hands tightly over her heart. This was because, just a moment before, she had told Judd Worth that she didn't care, either, about the things that were separating them—that she was brave enough to face whatever came; to walk booted over what lay between them.

She dropped in a heap on a ledge of stone, scattering the newly-flecked foliage just put there by the first hard frosts.

There was summer in the sun, but winter in the showery fall of leaves, and perfection in the thick, warm, woodsy odor. Across the broad valley below, the sound of cow bells came—tuneful and restful; a low-flying crow cawed close—all else was silence. Judd had gone down toward his home, the other way.

It had been so unexpected and quick. She had not known he was near, until she looked up startled, as she tore the bitter-sweet berries away. But for the bitter-sweet, she would have gone without seeing him again.

And what had he really said? Just that nothing mattered but the love they had carried so many years! And suddenly she was convinced, and knew that they, too, had a right to happiness, no matter over what obstacles they marched to get it.

II

SHE had always hated Marge, anyhow. She recalled the flood of hate that had swept her when she knew that Judd had married Margery Hansen. She had laughed, too, off there in the city where she was making a name for herself—laughed with a tang of bitterness, for Judd had belonged to her.

In the early school days they had laughed together at Marge. On this same mountainside they had run away to hide from her. Right over there, on the farther slope, she could see the bridge where they had said good-by when she was eighteen, and had the chance to show her drawings to people who knew how to draw and would help her.

He had said: "You're mine, Allie." Then she had gone, and stayed away long, and he had married Marge Hansen.

To-day he had just said, again: "You're mine, Allie."

And she was. She had not realized this fact, but it had taken her less than a second to know it when she saw him again.

It was not love, nor want of him, that had brought her back home. The old mountain place had passed to her, and she came to see it. Her intention was that she would sell it if it were really worth anything, and she came with both thought and heart upon her work, on the city, on her sophistication which was still new enough for her to contemplate.

A week ago? A lifetime ago? No matter at all how long! She had met Judd and, just as old romances tell it, love had come back—flooded back—told her that it was the only thing worth while. "And it is!" she said aloud.

One talk—just one—had fixed it. He had not told her much about his life, his home, or his family. But others had told her.

She had seen his home; it had belonged to Marge, and it looked like her—slatternly kept, dingy. The yard was full of rubbish—tin cans, chickens flapping about, upturned, rusty machinery, tubs on the porch, washing snapping on a line across the front of the house.

She hadn't seen Marge, unless the figure

that switched out of sight, and was gray, was she. Likely it was. Of course it was! Allison had scorned the entire place.

III

THEN she had met Judd on the road. Ah-h! It didn't matter at all what he was, or had been, or would be. She was as helpless as if she stepped off the ledge there.

She went to him just as fast as she would go down to the valley if she stepped off—catching at many things, flinging out her arms. It was quite the same as falling, the way she went to him.

It was done that way in fiction, and she had laughed at it. It was done that way in *life*!

And now, to-day, as she worried about it and picked bittersweet, he had found her. It appeared that he had talked it over with Marge, and hadn't hesitated to tell her the truth. He said she didn't care so much, and in this little time—this week or this lifetime—they had agreed.

"But how?" she had asked, bewilderedly, and her face warmed when she remembered how he had answered, and how she had looked at him—knowing that no man ever stood so straight, laughed so with tender eyes, spoke so with tender voice, was so full of strong, virile grace. His was the virility of the mountain man, unspoiled by the complacent city. It couldn't happen that way.

But it *had*!

"How can it be done?" she had asked.

"She wants to go to her father," he replied. "The stepmother has died—but, Allie—darling—you don't want to talk of it! Let it alone. Depend on me. There is freedom ahead for me, Allie—love. You don't need to know how!"

No, she didn't need to know. She was falling down and down—as off the ledge there.

She did say, slantingly: "No one hurt, Judd? I'd like no one to—"

"No, no one," he had answered.

IV

SHE didn't ask about the children. She knew there were children, but it embarrassed her to think of them, so she did not speak.

She gathered up her bittersweet, arose, and went slowly down to the road. It was four miles to the village.

That morning, at the hotel, she had con-

fusedly packed her bag, not knowing she would see Judd again, not expecting to do anything but run back to the city, and see what was left of it. Of course it would be all changed, but it had to be accepted and lived in. No use beating her head against the stone wall of what was.

She had taken a long, farewell walk; had remembered how the bittersweet used to grow near the old schoolhouse; had climbed for it. Then Judd had found her. He had watched her all the way from the village, he said.

Now she would stay on at the hotel, and in a few days would be able to understand what had happened, and know the practical things to be done, for there were still practical things in the world. She was not so crazy that she did not remember what ten years of them had taught her.

Down on the broad State road she walked toward the village. The stretch of shiny, black highway was deserted. An occasional motor car flashed past.

She walked on, smiling faintly; turned the collar of her thick sweater high to meet her soft hat; tucked her hands in the deep pockets. She found a piece of chocolate in a pocket, and nibbled it as she went. It restored realities to nibble chocolate.

Some one came up behind her, and she turned.

V

PERHAPS he was eight years old. Allison so judged him, although she didn't know much about ages of children.

His long trousers had belonged to an older boy; they wrinkled all the way down his legs, and they sagged in the seat. They were hitched high on one side, with a great white button holding them up to a blue gingham waist. The sweater had belonged to a big boy, too; its stained purple needed washing.

From under a queer little hat he smiled at her with curiosity.

"Well, sir," said Allison, smiling, too. "Where are you going?"

"T' th' village. On errands."

"Four miles?"

"That ain't much."

"Not for a mountain boy. Do you live around here?"

"Yes, ma'am. A mile back."

Allison found another piece of chocolate, and proffered it. He shook his head.

"No, ma'am."

"Don't you like chocolate?"

"Yes, ma'am. But I don't feel like a eatin' to-day."

"I thought boys always felt like eating."

"Not me, to-day. I'm worrit. I has t' go away from home."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, ma'am, an' it's pretty bad."

"Pretty bad, boy? How do you mean?"

"I has t' go down t' a Home t' live."

"Oh—and don't you like it? Why do you have to go?"

"M' mother, she's a goin' away. It's pretty bad."

"Won't she take you?"

"No, ma'am. She can't. I has t' go t' th' Home."

"Well, I expect it will be pretty nice at the Home." Allison thought to comfort him. In her inner turmoil she was giving only half of her mind to the conversation. "Lots of boys to know; lots of playtime."

He was not comforted.

"M' mother, she's a goin' nex' Tuesday, she says. It's pretty bad."

Allison looked down at him. Because of the tears in his voice, she thought to see them in his eyes. But she did not.

He was not crying. He was trudging along beside her, helping the one white button to keep his trousers in position—serious—a fretted forehead.

Not crying—but with backed-up tears in his throat and his voice. She would rather he had cried.

She looked down at him again. The dry eyes were brown—set far apart—

Her pulses clamped tight; her breathing halted; she stopped dead still.

"What is your name?" she managed to demand.

"Juddie Worth."

VI

Of course! She might have known. The way life had been flinging her about the last few days, she might have known it had more trials for her.

Juddie Worth! She said it twice.

The boy pushed against her to indicate a rushing automobile that had honked loudly. It roared by.

"Juddie Worth." She said it again.

What to say? What to do? She who—

"Where is the Home, Juddie?"

"It's down t' Harperstun."

They walked on silently. One could walk on, it seemed, as worlds crashed.

"Why doesn't your mother take you with her?"

To find a solution! Oh, yes—find one if she could!

"She can't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And won't your — father — keep you with him?"

"No, ma'am."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

They walked on.

"It's pretty bad," Juddie Worth reiterated into a long silence.

VII

He padded beside her. The sole of one shoe was loose, and it flapped.

What did Judd mean by letting a child go like that? What did he mean by what he was about to do? What was all this, anyhow? She could not tell!

"Juddie, take my hand, will you?" Maybe she could think and understand if she touched the child. "Take my hand, Juddie, boy."

"No, ma'am. I has t' hold m' pants."

His refusal was apologetic, and his sad face friendly. She was aghast at the selfishness of adults who planned for themselves alone! What did Judd mean—and she—what did she mean? To push away something more than Marge, who was a slatternly woman.

"Where is your mother, Juddie, now?"

"She's at that house right over there. Mis' Bergan she died, an' ma's stayin' with 'em. Ma's awful good when folks dies. She goes an' stays an' does their work for 'em. An' she's awful good when folks is sick. I'm sick a lot. I want my ma then. I don't know who'll stay by now when I'm sick. Ma's awful good."

"Good!" repeated Allison, not questioningly at all.

VIII

THERE was time when she reached the hotel to write to Judd.

She wrote the letter hotly; she was agonized, angry, indignant with him, and with herself. There were responsibilities in which sentiment had no right.

Furiously, she told him so. And the tears that were shed seemed to fall, not on

shriveled romance, but on a trudging child tugging at a big white button.

IX

A PULLMAN porter brushed up scattered, scarlet bittersweet berries that afternoon.

"Th' way these here city folks lug weeds in is sickenin'," he muttered.

Allison watched him brush up and carry them away—turning her head slowly to follow with her eyes those last reminders of a brief ecstasy, forever put aside.

The Wounds of a Friend

JOYCE BIGELOW AND JOHN MORGAN CONQUER THEMSELVES,
AND DISCOVER THEY HAVE WON A GREAT REWARD

By William Merriam Rouse

WAITING for the end of all hope was the hardest thing John Morgan had ever done. He thought of a dog he had read about that lay on its master's grave and waited to die. He felt like that. With luck, the end would come in a few hours, and toward that event he looked with relief.

His best friend would come swinging out of the woods, with the steady flop-flop of snowshoes, and the girl they both loved would marry that friend. It would be over, and John Morgan could take his suffering and hide it from the smiles of the two who were happy.

Morgan was as gray in spirit as the heavy winter morning. He was ready to break, just as a storm was ready to break over the dim peaks of the mountains.

Somewhere among them Jimmy Palmer was coming, on his way in from the lumber woods, with a heart that grew lighter as the miles swept backward and brought him nearer each hour to Joyce Bigelow. She was probably thinking of him now, as she went about her work inside the snow-banked house at which Morgan stared.

She would be making perfect, golden brown buckwheat cakes for breakfast. John Morgan hoped it was the last meal he would ever have to eat with her.

His powerful shoulders trembled inside his sheepskin-lined jacket as if with a chill. Then the pointed chin of a born fighter snapped up, and his kindly gray eyes hardened. It was one of those things that had

to be gone through with, like killing a horse that could no longer eat.

Three months ago he had shaken hands with his friend, when Jimmy Palmer started for the lumber woods. He had promised to look after the girl Jimmy was going to marry; and do chores for her and old Jeremiah Bigelow, her grandfather. Well, he had done it; and never once in the weeks since he found out that he loved Joyce had he said a word to her that he would not have had Jimmy hear.

He wished now that something had cried out a warning when she asked him, in the beginning, to eat breakfast and supper with her and old Jeremiah. Afterward it would have looked strange to stop without a good excuse; a man who was doing his own housework would have to give some good reason for refusing two perfect, woman-cooked meals a day.

So he had kept on, suffering with each rippling cadence of her voice. There was nothing in the world like her; he had never before seen a girl with dark blue eyes and hair the color of a polished copper kettle.

No wonder gay, light-hearted Jimmy Palmer had fallen in love with her at first sight, and asked her to marry him before he had known her a week. Morgan understood how a man like Jimmy, dashing through life with a laugh, would instantly seize Joyce as his own. She was gay, like Palmer; often she smiled from some inward joy, with a flash of white teeth, when there was nothing to make her smile.

Lately she had been quieter, but that would naturally be because Jimmy had been gone so long. Improvident Jimmy had gone to earn money to get married, refusing to borrow from the fat, open purse of his friend.

John Morgan pulled himself out of his reverie. There was a dash of snow in the air; fine, stinging pellets that drove down at a long angle. The bowl of sky was cupped close over the world, and it seemed as though a man could reach up and touch it from one of the mountains.

Morgan was glad he had plenty of firewood under cover. The air had warmed a little since yesterday, and more snow was coming; a lot of it. He brushed his feet at the back door with an old broom, and went slowly into the kitchen to face the ordeal of breakfast.

II

"HELLO!" Joyce flipped a cake over with an expert movement of the wrist. "How many can you eat, John?"

"Oh—I don't know!" He took off his jacket and hung it on a hook behind the door. "Not very hungry, Joyce."

"My goodness!" She crinkled her eyes with the smile that was like a glowing light. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you'd got to go to a funeral to-day!"

"It ain't a funeral," Jeremiah Bigelow said, and leaned forward in the rocking chair which was sacred to him, and rested a bony chin on his cane. The old man's body was worn by many years, but his mind was undimmed, and at times Morgan had an uncanny feeling that the piercing eyes of Jeremiah saw through him and beyond him.

"What is it, gram'pa?" asked Joyce.

"It's the megirms!" He rattled a short, dry laugh out of his throat without the change of a muscle in his face. "Young fellers have 'em!"

"Will buckwheat cakes help 'em?" queried Morgan, forcing an uneasy smile. Jeremiah had few, if any, restraints on his tongue.

"It ain't the stummick that needs treatment!" he chuckled. "It's another part of the innards! Higher up and on the left side!"

"Draw up your chair, gram'pa!" exclaimed Joyce, hastily. "Hurry, while the cakes are hot!"

Jeremiah winked with meaning, but

Morgan ignored the wink. He knew that the graceless old scamp liked him, and he was fond of Bigelow, but this morning his nerves were a little too raw for pointed jokes. The nearer Jeremiah Bigelow drew to the grave the more careless he became of human conventions.

For a time breakfast went on in silence, Joyce eating daintily and slowly, gram'pa with relish, and Morgan forcing down mouthful after mouthful of cakes and delicious maple sirup which had been skillfully boiled down to the right thickness. It was tasteless to him that morning.

"Jimmy ought to be here before dark," he remarked at last, out of sheer necessity for breaking the silence that seemed to him like a gray fog.

"Mebbe so, and mebbe not!" grunted Jeremiah.

"He'll come," said Joyce, quietly. "He wrote he had finished his time, and that he'd start yesterday morning."

"That 'll bring him in this afternoon," Morgan agreed. "It's good traveling now, with a crust and some light snow on top. He probably slept in Perkett's camp last night, and that's better than halfway here."

Morgan looked up from his plate and met the gaze of Joyce. It was grave and deep, as though she had retired within herself for meditation. The little sparkles which he liked to watch had faded out of her eyes, and the pupils were enlarged so that they appeared black. Her color had died, leaving her skin milk white, rare and delicate.

He ached with the contemplation of that forbidden beauty. If only he had been neighborly when the Bigelows first moved into the neighborhood, instead of letting Jimmy get ahead of him! But, no, Jimmy would have cut him out, anyway.

"Going outdoors to look at the weather!" barked gram'pa, suddenly. He pushed away from the table, and hit the floor a vicious whack with his cane. "God-freys! I'm upshot to-day!"

"Do you want a dose of medicine for your rheumatism?" asked Joyce.

"No!" He glared at her. "I want a chaw of tobacker, and as soon as my breakfast settles I'm a going to draw me a pitcher of cider! Them's the remedies I need! Lemme alone!"

In spite of his burst of energy Jeremiah Bigelow accepted, although with a snort of disgust, the help that Morgan offered in

getting into his mackinaw. He stumped out and slammed the door.

III

JOHN MORGAN began to fill his pipe, looking studiously down at the seasoned bowl. He knew he was doing it merely as an excuse to stay a minute or two longer. The right thing to do would be to put on his jacket and go.

"When you come back to-night, Jimmy will be here," said Joyce. Her voice sounded dull; she was pushing plates aimlessly about on the table.

"You won't need me if he gets here," muttered Morgan. "But maybe I'd better show up, in case he gets in tired or late."

"Don't you want to see him?" Joyce inquired.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Of course I want to see Jimmy! But—you'll have a lot to say to each other. You know!"

"I know better than you do!" She spoke in a low voice, with her gaze traveling out of the window to rest upon snow tinged with gray in the somber light.

Morgan did not understand why she was so depressed, unless she guessed what was in his mind and felt sorry for him. She should have been bubbling. He was uneasy with the feeling of impending evil.

"I'll come over to see that you're all right for the night, Joyce, and if Jimmy's here I'll just say hello. I know he will be. He can walk down to my house for a visit when he gets ready."

"You might as well come just the same as usual, John." She paused, and hesitated, and with the next words her voice arose to a thin, forced cry.

"I've made up my mind not to marry Jimmy Palmer!"

No physical blow could have staggered John Morgan mentally as did the impact of that sentence upon his consciousness. For a moment he was stunned; then shattered. He actually took a step backward while he tried to gather his faculties.

"Not marry Jimmy—" He swallowed, and cleared his throat. "You don't mean to say that you don't want to marry him?"

"That's it!" she answered dully.

"But Jimmy's been planning—why, Joyce! He'll take it awful hard!"

"I can't help it." She spoke in a monotone, still looking out of the window with unseeing eyes. "I don't feel the same way I did, John. I *can't* do it. I've thought a

lot. It would please him right now, but after a little while he'd be just as miserable as I would. That's the way those things go. It wouldn't work. I've—I've changed, John!"

"Jimmy didn't figure on your being a girl that would change, Joyce!"

Morgan did not realize that rebuke had crept into his voice until after the words were spoken. She flashed a glance at him. It was drenched with pain, and he hated himself. He would have died rather than hurt her.

"There are things people can't help!" Her voice pierced the air; he did not blame her for being angry at his blundering.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded," he said, humbly. "I wasn't thinking of you as being flighty. I was just thinking of how Jimmy would feel."

"That's it!" she cried. To his amazement she blazed at him; her knuckles white, lips white, eyes radiant with anger. "You never do think of me!"

"Joyce!" He gasped at what seemed to him the injustice of it.

"Or of yourself!"

She hurled at him those three words. They jarred him. They drove open a door and let in a blinding glare of light. He was dazzled, and smitten spiritually to his knees.

Now came the understanding of why she had acted so strangely; she revealed herself in voice and eyes. She loved him.

He was swept up to a mountain top and shown the kingdoms of the world spread out before him. She was the glory and beauty of the world for him, and he could have her for the taking.

"Joyce!" he whispered.

"Yes!" He saw her eyes melt and change from black to blue; they became bluer than cornflowers, and deep with love. Her rigid muscles relaxed, and he knew, all unskilled though he was with women, that he had but to step across the six feet between them and take her in his arms. She waited.

IV

IN man there is a power stronger than the unharnessed sea; greater than the masses of the heavens going on their appointed ways. Morgan raised that power within himself. He conjured it from the unknown place where it dwells.

Drops hung cold upon his forehead and

upon the backs of his hands. He suffocated. The room jumped and sagged to his vision. Tiny muscles which had never made themselves felt before twitched and jerked with the strain, but he stood fast.

"Jimmy's my friend," he said, huskily.

Astonishment swept across her face like the shadow of a cloud. Her lips fell apart. She drew quick, short breaths.

"He's your friend!" she repeated, and there was an acid scorn in her voice that seared him.

"Joyce!" Morgan cried. "I guess you know—how I feel about you! Lemme tell you about Jimmy! Five years ago we took a piece of woods to lumber off. I got sore throat in camp. I knew what it was, and I told him so he could get out. Diphtheria! Well, he dragged me on a sled ten miles to another camp. The people there run. Jimmy stayed and took care of me!"

He knew it was lame talk, but she seemed to understand what he was trying to say. Her mouth straightened, and lines of pain grew down from her nostrils. She, also, was fighting a battle.

"I can't marry him, anyway," she said in a low voice, as if she were speaking to herself.

"Maybe not," agreed Morgan.

"We could tell him!"

"It would be the same. He trusted me, and I stole his girl!"

"What of the girl?" she cried, in a voice like tearing cloth. "You've got your friendship, you two! What has the girl got? Oh, my God! And you'll always think you've done a big thing!"

"No!" Morgan pleaded, in agony that she misunderstood him. "I never wanted anything as much as I do you, Joyce, and I'll never want anything at all again! It's with me just the same way you said it was with you a minute ago! I *can't*!"

She locked her hands together and beat them against her mouth, walking back and forth between the stove and the table. Back and forth; hurried trips until he wondered whether she would ever stop.

But when she did come to a halt and look at him again he saw that there had been a change. There was a little spot of crimson upon her lower lip; and above that twisted mouth her eyes were shining, unutterably sad.

"You're right, John. I see. You can't, and I can't. It's that way because we're us. But I wish you'd stay until he gets

here. It's going to be kind of hard. And I feel queer—as though something might happen. Gram'pa feels it, too."

Harder and harder. He would have to see Jimmy take her in his arms; but it was all he could do for her. The shaking legs of the man let him down into a chair. He rubbed his handkerchief over his forehead and his damp hands.

"Of course, I'll stay if you want me, Joyce. Jimmy won't make any trouble, if that's what you're afraid of. He'll be cut up when you tell him you can't marry him, but he won't hurt you."

"I don't know what he'll do. He's like me. Flash and strike! Just the way I hurt you a few minutes ago! But I didn't ask you to stay because I was afraid of him. It's just a queer feeling."

"It's the weather," said Morgan. "And gram'pa's probably got a touch of rheumatism, although he won't admit it."

At that moment the door opened and the old man came stamping in with something close to a smirk on his face. Then he changed, peering from one to the other. He glared.

"Blizzard!" he growled. "And I'm dummed glad of it!"

V

MORGAN stepped quickly to the door and looked out. The fine drift of snow had increased to a steady fall of wind-driven flakes. Some of them came like fine shot, biting the flesh as they struck. Others danced wildly upon the shifting air; light and fantastic in the geometrical forms of ordinary flakes.

The wind shifted, hurried, menaced. There was a waving curtain of snow between the valley and the mountains. It was as yet thin, but the peaks were like ghosts behind that curtain. Morgan closed the door.

"It begins like a blizzard," he admitted, slowly; "but a man can travel all right, now. In the woods it's better, anyway. No wind, and not enough loose snow yet to make the going hard."

"It 'll be darker 'n a stack of black cats by four o'clock," Jeremiah grunted. In his corner by the stove he seemed to relish the prospect of a great storm.

"Jimmy ought to be here by that time," Morgan muttered. "He'd come straight southeast from the camp."

"Maybe it 'll break away and clear be-

fore night," said Joyce. She went about her neglected housework with listless hands.

"Mebbe it won't!" her grandfather flared. "If you younguns had any brains you'd know it! And a lot of other things, too!"

To that no one replied. Morgan sat down and lighted the pipe he had filled long since. An hour of silence wore away, and he went to the door again. Jeremiah Bigelow had known what he was talking about.

A blizzard was wrapping the world in its gray cloak; growing worse with that slow progress which means dangerous weather. It had grown colder again, and the wind had settled to a steady, relentless gale.

The day drifted on. In the kitchen there was little sound except the snap and purr of the fire; and the unobtrusive movements of Joyce as she went about her work. John Morgan had too much to think about to talk; and, after all, there was nothing more to be said. He could only wait, and urge the hours forward.

Joyce was silent and grave, with the smile gone from her eyes. Morgan saw them grow wet, brimming over, when she thought he was not looking.

Old Jeremiah paid no attention to either of them. He sat with his head sunk between his shoulders, filled with meditations which held him even from his customary interest in the weather.

At noon they ate indifferently, and resumed the vigil. It was after the midday dinner that time became unbearable. The old man shifted restlessly in his chair, and Joyce, after she had washed the dishes, stood before a window staring out at the gray wall of the storm. Her finger tips drummed regularly, monotonously, upon a pane half covered with frost.

At three o'clock she lighted the lamps, for it had begun to grow dark. Up to this time Morgan had held himself in restraint, smoking pipe after pipe, and at intervals filling the stove with wood. Now he got up and paced the floor.

Since he had first realized that the storm was of serious proportions, an idea had been taking shape in his mind. In the beginning a nebulous possibility, it had now become fixed. It was a necessity. He sat down and began to relace his shoe pacs, drawing the rawhide thongs tight, and rolling his woolen socks down over their tops.

"I'm going out to meet Jimmy," he announced calmly.

"No!" Joyce sprang across the room and gripped his shoulders. "You can't find him!"

"I've got to try," he replied, simply. Then he looked up, and winced at the fear in her eyes. "I'll go as far as I can, Joyce, and come back if I don't find him."

"Oh, is everything—everything going to be lost?"

She turned sharply away, as if ashamed of the cry that had been wrung from her. Morgan went on with his preparations. His hands shook as he pulled his cap down over ears and neck and buttoned the sheep-lined jacket. He belted it in and wound a long muffler around his head so that he was protected except for eyes and a breathing space.

Old Jeremiah watched him with a gleam in his hawklike gaze.

"Godfreys!" he barked. "It's a man's job! I wisht I had a pair of legs under me!"

VI

MORGAN brought his snowshoes from the woodshed and put them on in the kitchen, testing the harness carefully. A broken strap or a loose buckle might make the difference between life and death. He straightened up at last, clattering against the floor, and pulled on his mittens.

Joyce came and stood in front of him. She put her hands on his shoulders and her eyes were shining, but not with tears.

"Kiss me," she commanded softly.

Another part of John Morgan took command of him. His arms flung her against the broad expanse of his jacket, and held her there with a fierce intensity that crushed her shoulders together. She seemed to welcome his strength. Her mouth gave itself to him. For a moment he lost the world.

Slowly he set her away at arm's length. She stood motionless, with her eyes still closed. Without a word of farewell or a backward glance, Morgan went out into the storm.

Outside he found that he could barely distinguish the vague form of the barn, little more than a hundred feet distant. The mountains were blotted out. Frozen snow nipped his face like pincers. The wind tore at his breath.

He put his head down and threw up a shoulder to meet it as he started for the woods, taking his bearings from the house.

He could march in a reasonably straight line now; it was the return that he dreaded.

A tree trunk came out of the blankness, and Morgan knew that he had made the woods. He turned and looked back. House and barn had disappeared behind a grayish-white curtain. Ahead it was better. The snow was coming down like a cloud, but the force of the wind was broken, and a man could walk standing erect. He took his bearings again from a dead pine and started on.

There was a fair chance that he would meet Jimmy Palmer. He knew the way an experienced woodsman would come; through this ravine, down that snow-covered brook for a certain distance. There was no trail, but there was a well defined and easy route in from the lumber woods.

A man provided sensibly for the journey would have been able to make camp and wait, but Morgan knew that Jimmy would carry no pack, and that he would wear as little clothing as possible. A dash in the face of the storm, hoping to beat it; that would be Jimmy.

Morgan went steadily on. He was a walking mound of snow that stopped now and then to clear the opening for breathing and the strip in front of his eyes. Thus far he had not suffered.

He was a strong man, fresh from a day's rest, and for a long time the increasingly heavy going did not tire him. He would be able to march farther than he had thought before turning back.

Before turning back? Did he want to turn back at all? Out here, alone with himself, he admitted the secret hope that had been in his mind. If he could not find Jimmy, then Joyce would belong to him. He loathed himself because of that hope. He had not believed himself capable of such a feeling. John Morgan had always been an honest man.

He knew better than to think that Jimmy had not started; or that he was not in distress somewhere in the woods. So all Morgan had to do was to turn back at any moment, lying to himself with a murderous falsehood—telling himself that he had done all he could. Then he would have Joyce for his own; and in the spring somebody would find Jimmy curled up where he had fallen.

The thought that he might lie to himself was like poison to Morgan. No matter when he turned back he would think the

next day, being refreshed, that he had stopped too soon. Better to go on until he gave out and fell; better to stay there in the mountains than to smudge the white feeling that he and Joyce had for each other now. He was caught in a trap. He did not want to live.

VII

It was Jimmy Palmer who stopped John Morgan from marching on until the storm wore him down. In a narrow ravine there was something, weighted with snow, which was neither rock nor bush. It leaned upright against a tree, but Morgan might have passed it if it had not moved a little as he came near.

He brushed away the white covering. Jimmy Palmer's face was there, spotted with frost. His eyelids were frozen down.

At a touch Jimmy's knees buckled under him, and he would have gone down if it had not been for the strong arm of his friend. Nothing but a jersey with a lumberman's shirt over it; as much clothing as a man would wear to go a few miles in fair winter weather, and no more, was Jimmy's protection. One mitten was filled with snow.

For the moment Morgan was lifted out of the depths of his own misery. With double handfuls of snow he rubbed Jimmy's face; he pounded and slapped and shook him until Palmer was able to stand, wabbling, upon his own legs, and groan. He tried to lie down, and Morgan struck him a weighty blow.

"Come on, Jimmy! We've got to march!"

"Can't!"

"You've got to!"

"Want to die!" Palmer moaned. "Snowshoe busted! Lemme alone!"

Morgan dropped to his knees and found that one snowshoe was smashed beyond hope of use; and then he knew that it might well be an evil day for both of them. A man in his full vigor could not travel without snowshoes in that depth of snow.

Jimmy would not go on alone if Morgan gave him all his own equipment. Perhaps he could not; but certainly he had given up. That was what made the great difference. Jimmy had given up.

Morgan took a great breath. He would never give up anything he wanted to do. His lips drew tight against his teeth and the cords in his neck strained until they hurt. He remembered the time when his

own vast strength had been brought down to the tumbled blankets of a bunk; the long sled trip, days and nights of pain.

Jimmy, the gay, the laughing, wanted to live, although he had just said that he wanted to die. This broken man was not Jimmy.

John Morgan remembered that he had a debt to pay; and with that remembrance he put from him all thought of yielding. Let the wind come, bone searching, and the cold that was like a drug!

The body of his friend was now his charge, as the faith of that friend had been. He heard the high call to battle. He could not fail to fight as long as the power to fight remained in him.

Morgan stripped off his jacket and wrapped Palmer in it. Then he lifted him, glad that he was by many pounds the lighter man, and got him on his back.

He passed the muffler under Jimmy's armpits and across his own chest against that time when he could no longer keep hold of his burden. They would stand or fall together.

Morgan rested a moment, and then he set his feet along the way he had come. They were slow steps, and short.

A man endures to the utmost, and either it is enough or it is not enough. John Morgan bent under the weight of Jimmy, and tried not to think of the end; tried to think only of putting one foot in front of the other forever and ever.

With jacket and muffler gone, the fingers of the cold began to pinch him. Then, in spots, the sting turned to a dull ache and numbness. That was frostbite.

The cold seeped to his marrow, and still he went on. Sometimes he did not know whether he had fallen. He had to pull himself back from a far country to make sure that he was swaying along into the storm. The weight upon his shoulders had grown to be the weight of the whole world.

Perhaps he had gone in a circle. That thought did not trouble him greatly now. To keep going was what he had resolved upon—never to give up.

He might die, and that would be all right, but if he gave up he would be licked. That would not be all right. On and on and on he went.

VIII

SOMETHING stopped Morgan. It was a long time before he gave over trying to go

through it. Clapboards. A house wall! He followed along the wall, leaning against it, and suddenly knew that he had come to the Bigelow kitchen door.

There was no joy in him at the discovery. He was even a little disappointed that he could not keep going on.

For a time everything was vague, as though he were in a tight house of frosted glass, with shadows and sounds dim on the outside. Even his own body was outside.

Then he felt himself in a chair, and knew that they were rubbing snow on his cheeks. Snatches of vision and hearing told him that they were taking care of Jimmy; getting his clothes off and putting him to bed. There came the croak and cackle of Gram'pa Bigelow, and the hurried words of Joyce.

Then followed the smell and taste of a hot drink. Slowly, Morgan came up out of his exhaustion to a fierce pain in face and feet and hands. He was very tired, but he could see and hear and think again. Out of it with luck!

Fools were tough, as gram'pa had once said. He wished he were either bad or good. He was nothing but a plain fool, with streaks of good and bad.

The familiar kitchen straightened and settled to his gaze. From a bedroom came the voices of the old man and the girl; hushed and careful voices, which seemed to carry a peculiar significance to Morgan's ears. The tone was that of those who speak in the presence of death.

Morgan thrilled, and instantly hated himself for that emotion. Was there no good in him?

He wanted her so! But he knew that if Jimmy could be brought back to life by any effort of his, then that effort would be made. They were frightened, probably. It took a lot to kill a lumber jack, as Morgan had reason to know.

He pulled himself up out of his chair, wobbled, and finally got set on legs that creaked with each movement. He was sure he could bring Jimmy out of it.

Jeremiah Bigelow came forth from the bedroom, snorting. He paused to glare at Morgan, and then stumped across the room with his cane pounding the well-scrubbed boards at every step. Something had happened to upset completely what equilibrium he had under ordinary circumstances.

"Jimmy?" asked Morgan, with dry and awkward lips. "He—"

"Huh!" Gram'pa gnawed ferociously at his plug of tobacco. "Take more than a blizzard to kill him!"

The spirit of John Morgan was lifted by an unselfish joy. Queer, the feelings a man had. He was happier to have Jimmy alive than he would have been to know that he was out of the way by death. It made him think a little better of himself to feel this way. Jimmy's friendship had meant everything to him until the coming of Joyce Bigelow.

It was not often that a man had a friend who would stick in the face of death, as Jimmy had done. About the hardest death was a slow one, in bed, and Jimmy Palmer had faced that for him.

As Morgan went slowly and stiffly across the floor he realized that he had not, in reality, given up hope; neither now nor at any time during the past agonies. In a way he was cheered by the memory of his battle with the storm. Things came out all right in life's trials even when they seemed hopeless.

In time the tenseness of this situation would relax. Jimmy would take it hard at first, but time would cure him; and, after all, everything depended upon how he felt. Joyce would still be Jimmy in a year, or five years.

Standing in the doorway of the bedroom, Morgan experienced a depression, although he could not at the moment have said exactly why. Jimmy lay on his back with his eyes closed; his white face lumpy with swollen spots of frostbite. He muttered broken words, and with one hand tightly clutched the girl's fingers.

IX

PERHAPS it was the look upon her face that shadowed Morgan. Her cheeks were marred by the tracks of tears, and she gazed at him with eyes misty and tender with pity. But it was not for him; she was detached from him. He had seen women pray with the same evidence of things not visible reflected upon them.

"Jimmy's out of his head," she whispered. "He's been talking."

As though that whisper had reached his mind in its wandering, Jimmy Palmer's eyes opened. He stared at them without seeing. His other hand clutched at Joyce.

"You've got to marry me!" he cried, in a strong voice. "I—I can't live unless you do!"

"Yes, dear," she said, softly, and the sound of her voice seemed to quiet him for an instant. Then he cried out again.

"I've got to have you! I—need—you!"

"Yes, dear. I promise!"

Joyce looked up at Morgan, but he had already understood. Despair permeated all the fibers of his being. This was the end of hope.

He might have known that Jimmy would get her somehow, for Jimmy's was the need. Jimmy had needed him, out there in the woods. It was always the tough fools who had to suffer, for they could stand it when others could not.

Morgan knew that he could stand it, and Joyce knew it. There was a certain pride of strength in that knowledge. Nothing could kick his legs out from under him; not Joyce, not death, not anything.

"Yes," he rasped, "Jimmy does need you."

"It's you I love, John, but—"

"I know, Joyce."

X

JIMMY roused again, and with one arm he struck fiercely at some imaginary evil. His eyes glared in delirium, and his voice rang sharply through the stillness of the house, filled with anguish and pleading.

"Alice!" he cried. "You will marry me, won't you? I need you, Alice! I'll fix it—some way—with Joyce! I'll tell her! Will you—Alice?"

He wilted down upon the pillow, and his hand relaxed its grip. Slowly Joyce raised her fingers and stared at them, pink and white from that frantic grasp. She lifted her head. Through the mists in her eyes a miraculous joy was shining.

John Morgan was weaving a little upon his stiff legs. Jimmy had another girl! The thought rang through his head like chimes—bells on a Sunday morning, calling across a sparkling world.

He would have laughed aloud if he had not been awed by his happiness. His arms went out hungrily, and Joyce swiftly arose to meet them.

Morgan held her close to him as they went out of the room together, with his face buried in her lustrous, copper-colored hair. There was no need for words.

Even old Jeremiah, looking out of his corner with a sardonic grin of triumph, appeared to know that it was not a time for talk.

Nan Listens In

HERE IS THE TELEPHONE IN ITS WORST ASPECT, WITH THE
WRONG PARTIES GETTING THE RIGHT NUMBERS

By Reita Lambert

THE lobby of the Hotel Elite lay in that somnolent hush which falls upon New York about the time when the last tardy theatergoers are rustling into their seats. It is the hour when taxi drivers light a fresh cigarette and swap biographical data at the cab stands; the hour when waiters count their tips, and switchboard operators repair their complexions if so inclined.

The switchboard operator of the small but fashionable Hotel Elite was, in fact, just making a final pass at an unclassic but adequate little nose when a tender, masculine voice sounded close to her ear.

"Hello, Nanums!"

She drew back startled, and swiftly slid her compact out of sight.

"My goodness, Hal! Where'd you drop from?"

"I didn't drop. I flew on the wings of Eros," returned the young man promptly.

"I'm afraid I don't know the party."

"Let me introduce you," he begged, and grinned.

He was a good-looking youth, with honest eyes and a boyish grin. It was the light in those eyes now that moved the little switchboard operator to give an earnest moment to her lights and plugs. Then she looked up.

"Where you bound for?"

"Got to cover a political meeting uptown, but I'll be through by eleven."

"Yes?" she said politely.

"You're through at eleven, aren't you?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"I'll come along back, then—how about it?" he suggested.

She considered the matter thoughtfully while she inspected her fair boyish bob with dainty finger tips.

"Oh, all right," she murmured at last.

"That all you got to say?"

"What do you want me to say?" she inquired innocently.

He told her with his eyes while the color rode up beneath the smooth layer of powder on her cheeks, and then he was gone. She watched his tall figure swing across the foyer, and she sighed. He was such a darling, and yet he was only a cub reporter.

When Nan Brian—christened Annie O'Brian some twenty years before by Father Duffy himself—had left a Bronx central office to preside over the telephonic whims of the Hotel Elite, she had considered her small feet firmly planted on the ladder of social success. It was then that she had clipped the "Annie" to Nan, and decapitated the "O" from an honorable but slightly plebeian surname. And these outward changes had been indicative of others less manifest.

Not for nothing had she studied life through the helpful medium of the silver screen; not for nothing had she witnessed thereon the elevation of myriad humble working girls to a world of limousines and permanent waves. A careful census of these fortunates proved that more wealthy and ardent bachelors plucked their wives from behind hotel switchboards than from any other source. And yet here was Nan, scarcely three months at the Elite, yearning after a cub reporter whose weekly salary barely covered his own expenses.

Well, she thought wistfully, he was real, anyway. Those three months had taught Nan some things. They had taught her, for example, to distinguish between the real and the false, and Hal was real, which was more than could be said of the majority of gorgeous young gentlemen who decorated the lobby of the Hotel Elite. So was Nan

real, for that matter—despite her veneer of sophistication; despite her decision that Hal must be disposed of as an obstacle in the path of her ambitious dreams.

When she relinquished her switchboard to the sallow-faced young man who was the night operator, she had a little speech of dismissal for Hal already formulated in her mind. She meant to lose no time in delivering it.

But she found him waiting outside the revolving doors, his eager grin a little pinched by the chill January breeze, and somehow she let him take possession of her arm as if he owned it. She said nothing but—"H'lo, Hal!"

They took the subway uptown, stopped for a hot chocolate at a corner drugstore, and then walked east to the dingy apartment house that sheltered the O'Brian brood. In the vestibule, Nan fumbled in her bag for the key, and in her mind for the opening sentences of her farewell speech.

It was a dim little cubicle, that vestibule, and everybody knows that vestibules are architectural concessions to love. Hal knew it, at least, and before Nan had found either of the things she was searching for, he had her in his arms.

"Nan, I love you! Oh, Nanums, I love you so, dear! And yet I'm so dog-gone poor! You deserve something better than that! Will you wait, darling? Will you wait till I make good?"

And Nan found words.

"Y-yes, Hal."

"You precious darling!"

"And don't you worry, Hal, about being poor. I—I'm used to being poor."

"Do you love me, Nan?" Her mute reply made him a giant in a pygmy world. "I'm going to make good, Nan. I can do it, too, now that I've got you to work for—and help me. I'm going to make some regular money."

"Money isn't everything!" declared Nan, with the enthusiasm which accompanies a great discovery. "And I want to help you, Hal—I do!"

Sincere as was the desire, she was a little uncertain how it was to be done. She thought about it that night after she had crawled into bed beside her sister, Mamie O'Brian, who was still in grammar school, and smelled of licorice—even in sleep. She lay there, her eyes glowing with the memory of those magic moments in the

vestibule. Magic they must certainly have been, else where were her dreams of wealth and luxury!

II

RUTHIE DEAN was the first to hear the news. Ruthie was in charge of the switchboard of a rival hotel on the next block. The following noon she teetered in to the Elite on her absurd spindly heels, and Nan announced her engagement.

"To Hal Maynard! That young reporter?" Ruthie exclaimed, with no attempt to conceal her disdain. "What are you going to live on—air pudding?"

"He may be poor," Nan said haughtily, "but he's real. He's not one of the stuffed clothes racks that hang around hotels. And he's got some principles. He's a gentleman, and that's everything."

"Well, he has to eat, even if he is."

"We're not going to be married until—until he gets a raise," Nan told her friend stiffly.

"I sh'd hope not," Ruthie said dryly.

"And he'll get it, too. There's plenty of money in literature when you make good."

She tried hard to believe it, too, in the weeks that followed. Hal talked optimistically of the future.

"You see," he confided to Nan, "I've got to show 'em down at that office. They haven't given me any big assignments yet, but I've got some friends who know the inside dope about some things, and they're going to tip me off the next time anything big breaks. That'll mean a feather in my cap, and a raise, too."

"I s'pose they want some big scandal," Nan guessed. Hal's paper specialized in the most varied and colorful scandals.

Discussing the matter with Ruthie next day, that sage young person remarked: "I should think you could give him enough dope for half a dozen scandals." Nan looked her amazement at that, and Ruthie chuckled: "Sa-ay! Don't you ever listen in at all?"

"No!" Nan said, disgusted. "I'm not risking my job. Besides, what do I want to listen in for?"

"Good way to keep posted," Ruthie said calmly. "There's no danger—everybody knows we do it. Say, I get more boxes of candy and sweet smiles from some of our people who are scared I know too much! Bribes! That's what." She broke off to

giggle. "You listen in on some of your connections—you'll get some stuff that may be news for your boy friend. Or send him over to me! I could tell him some things—only he couldn't print all of 'em!"

"Hal wouldn't want me to listen in!" Nan declared loftily.

"Go on! He wants news, don't he? There's that Du Val woman over at our place! You ought to hear *her*. A lot of times lately I've called a man over here for her—man named Finck; know him?"

"Of course, but he's *nice*. He's married—he and his wife have one of our best suites when they're in town. *She's* just *sweet!*"

"I guess *he* don't think she's half as sweet as the Du Val girl over at our place. I've heard him talk to her. You ought to see her! I'll wise you up next time she calls him, eh?"

The conversation had a curious effect upon little Nan Brian. Hitherto, although so closely allied to the extravagant pagantry about her, she had never thought of herself as part of it. Her business lay with her switchboard, over whose vagaries she exercised a vigilant efficiency.

Occasionally, bits of the alien world she served found their way to her utilitarian niche—a box of candy, a cluster of violets, a slim phial of perfume. These she had always received with a grateful little thrill.

But now, in the light of Ruthie's larger wisdom, she recalled them with a newer understanding. Perhaps they were bribes, too. If this were so, then there were things to know about the patrons of the Elite—things she might be able to tell Hal to his advantage.

It was after this that Nan became an addict—a mild one, to be sure—of the pernicious habit of "listening in." And she learned a good many things about this gaudy and tinselled world in which she spent something over eight hours every day. Many of the things she learned gave her spiritual indigestion.

There were the Fincks, for example. She had thought them so delightful; little Mrs. Finck, especially. A sweet little woman, Mrs. Finck, with wistful eyes and a friendly smile for the little switchboard operator. Once she had taken off a corsage of orchids she was wearing and given it to Nan.

It was terrible to think that Mr. Finck and that Du Val woman who lived in Ruthie's hotel—but there it was. Nan her-

self had called the Du Val woman for him—and always when Mrs. Finck was out.

"What's she like, anyway—that Du Val woman?" Nan asked Ruthie one day. "Is she an actress?"

"Course she's an actress," Ruthie rejoined dryly, "only not on the stage—if that's what you mean. She don't have to act—on the stage. Say, you ought to see her throw the money around!"

"I wouldn't want to! I think it's awful—the whole business!"

"Sure it's awful," agreed Ruthie cheerfully. "You're just beginning to find that out, aren't you? Say, why don't you put your boy friend wise to old Finck and Clare Du Val? You wouldn't be running any risk. You could tell him just enough so he could go out and get the facts himself—he'd know how to do it."

"Oh, I couldn't," Nan said with a shudder. "It'd be too—too nasty."

"It's nasty, anyway," Ruthie opined philosophically; "and it's going to come out sooner or later, anyway. I should think you'd want to help your big boy."

And so she did, Nan told herself. She had never wanted anything more, not even a permanent wave or a limousine. But surely Hal himself would be unwilling to rise to success at the cost of a wife's happiness. Thus argued the conscientious Nan, only to be disillusioned that very evening.

It was her "evening off," and she and Hal were strolling up Broadway toward a favorite movie palace of theirs. At Forty-Fifth Street they were held up by the congested traffic, and suddenly Hal pressed her arm.

"See that old boy—that one in the car there, with the plain little woman?"

Nan looked, saw Mr. Finck and his wife, and nodded.

"Well, his name's Finck," vouchsafed Hal in a low voice. "He's got a house as big as the public library up near Tarrytown. I've got my eye on that duffer. I think he's going to net me a pretty little story one of these days."

"Wh-what do you mean?" asked Nan faintly.

"I mean he's a little too good to be true," Hal told her laconically. "I've got some friends who have given me a tip on him, and I'm just waiting for a chance to play it."

"But, Hal," Nan said earnestly, "he's got a wife—a nice wife—and if you were

to publish any scandal about him, think how it 'd be for her."

"But she'd have to find out about him sooner or later," Hal explained, unconsciously using Ruthie's argument. "I might as well spring it and get the benefit as well as the next one."

Thus disarmed, Nan confessed:

"I know them—they come in and stay at the Elite for a month at a time. They're there now, Hal, and I think I know what you mean—about him. Maybe I—maybe I could find out some things for you—"

"Nan! My gosh! That *is* an idea! Now look here, there's a woman named Du Val—"

"I know."

"You do, Nan?" She nodded dejectedly. "Well, it isn't likely you'd hear anything of much value over your switchboard, but just the same if he calls her, or she calls him, I want you to remember what's said—no matter how unimportant it sounds—hear? Say, lamby, you may help me to land this, and if I do—"

The pressure of his arm on her own, the message in his eyes, told her what that might mean to them both. But Nan was curiously unresponsive.

She wouldn't have believed it of Hal. Even if he was willing to sacrifice his own self-respect, it wasn't chivalrous of him to ask her to jeopardize hers.

And it was unlawful, too, to listen like that—to a private conversation. She told him so, after a silent moment, and he answered her very gravely:

"Get this, precious! You'll be doing nothing but good all around if you can help me get something on that bird. Don't you worry about that part of it!"

III

BUT Nan did worry about it. Of course, she must do it for Hal. Her duty was clear. But when she took her place at her switchboard the next morning, she felt mean and guilty. To make matters worse, little Mrs. Finck stopped to chat with her on her way from the elevator. She was going shopping, she told Nan, for some things for the children.

"Oh, have you children?" asked Nan. That made it so much more dreadful.

"Two," Mrs. Finck told her. "You'd love them. They're three and six—such darlings. Some day I'm going to bring them in to see you."

She was scarcely out of the door when a light blinked on the switchboard, and Nan plugged in to hear Mr. Finck's suave voice. He was asking for Miss Du Val's number.

Grimly she made the call, reaching for her pad and pencil as she did so. She would take down as much of that conversation as she could. A maid's voice answered Mr. Finck first, and then came Miss Du Val's honeyed purr.

"That you, Howard, old thing?"

"None other. What's the news of my little Priscilla this morning? Is she all set?"

"Well, little Priscilla is, in a manner of speaking, all dressed up and nowhere to go, I'm afraid."

"No!" breathed Mr. Finck, with a suppressed excitement that made Nan shudder. "How does that happen? I thought we had all that fixed up."

"Ah, but the best laid plans, you know—"

"I see. And the little lady has got cold feet?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that; but the night has a thousand eyes, and I'm afraid they're not always closed."

"Oh, come! Are you sure you haven't a case of nerves this morning? Here we are all set, and you hoist the yellow flag. That isn't nice!"

"I'm thinking of you, mainly, Howard."

"Sweet child." He sighed. Nan could hear that sigh quite plainly. "Well, what do you suggest? I'm at your service."

"There's another place down there, not so far from Old Tim's. It's called The Elms. I understand it's very popular with sporting gentlemen this time of year."

"And what about it?"

"I think if you happened to be there around midnight with your inimitable powers of persuasion—"

"Wait a minute! Is this a rendezvous?"

"If you'll agree to it."

"You think it necessary to go down there?"

"Priscilla does, dear man. You'll drive, I suppose?"

"I suppose—if I must."

"Then you'd better leave earlier—for the sake of appearances. And you might tote along a gun or a rod, or whatever it is that sporting gents do tote along—see?"

"I bow to your wishes. Midnight at The Elms, then. You won't fail me?"

"Not I! I'll do my part. The rest is up to you."

"Good girl! I'll try to keep my pulse normal until then."

"That's right. I'm sorry about the hitch, but we can't be too careful. Until to-night, then! Toodle-oo," said Miss Du Val softly.

When Nan broke that connection, her cheeks were burning, her thoughts bitter and tumultuous. Well, at least she had the story. They hadn't fooled her, cryptic and guarded though they had been.

All the facts of that illicit rendezvous were hers—save the location of The Elms. And that was easy. Besides her training to meet emergencies, Nan had plenty of native resource. There was only one place that New Yorkers referred to as "down there," and that was Long Island. The reference to rods and guns made this guess a certainty almost.

Thank goodness, there were automobile guides and road maps. She dispatched a bellboy to the desk for this helpful literature. If she couldn't locate the place, Hal might know it. And, of course, the furtive Mr. Finck could always be followed.

But five minutes later she knew that this would not be necessary. She had not yet opened the first of the booklets the boy had brought her, when Mr. Finck put in another call. This time he wanted the garage which sheltered his glistening blue motor car when he was in town. Nan heard him demand his chauffeur, and waited breathlessly until that gentleman responded. Mr. Finck announced himself shortly:

"Mr. Finck speaking, Roy. A change in the program. I wish you'd get the car in shape and have it around here by five this afternoon. I'm going to run down on the Island—see if I can bring down a brace of ducks. I'll drive myself, and I wish you'd stay within call of Mrs. Finck. I'll be back in the morning—before lunch—"

Nan left him there to answer another call, and added a postscript to her notes. After five minutes of research, she located The Elms in a helpful "Guide for the Tourist." Her pretty lips were set in a grim line, and there was a bad aftertaste in her mouth, as though she had eaten something deleterious.

During the next few hours she waited impatiently for some word from Hal. Generally he called her up, or dropped in for a little chat some time during the day, and

she wanted to be rid of the unclean data she had thrust in her purse. The afternoon found her irritable and impatient.

And then, at three, Mrs. Finck came back from her shopping trip, and paused at the switchboard. Nan was aware of her presence only when a little oblong package was thrust into her hand. She looked up quickly.

"It's just a little something I happened to see—I thought it sort of looked like you."

Nan glanced in dismay from the package to the friendly, smiling face bent over her.

"Oh, but I *can't* take—"

"Nonsense. It's nothing, my dear. We're going back to the country to-morrow, and you've been so patient and obliging."

She smiled again, gave a quick little pat to the fair bobbed head, and hurried off.

Nan ripped open the package to find a delicate little beaded bag embedded in soft tissue paper. It was the daintiest bag she had ever seen, with the most lifelike little flowers and leaves, and the most exquisite silk lining, and a tiny sapphire in the silver clasp. A perfect thing of beauty—but it brought no joy to Nan.

This was no bribe. Mrs. Finck had no need to bribe—*she* had nothing to hide. The little bag was an expression of purest friendliness—and Nan was about to betray the giver into sorrow.

It was a terrible thought. It started a furious battle in Nan's mind. On the one hand there was Hal, to whom she certainly owed a loyal allegiance. On the other there was the defective Mr. Finck, who just as certainly deserved to be punished.

But, such was life; to punish Mr. Finck was to punish his innocent wife—and children. And Hal, whom she had thought so superior and high minded, would do that very thing, and solely that he might reap a profit from a fellow creature's loss.

It was horrid—the whole thing! And sordid. She had never realized how mean and sordid life could be until now. And indirectly, it had been Hal who was responsible for her awakening. In her rising anger she believed this fully.

If Hal had looked at her closely when he burst in on her an hour or so later, he might have spared himself the deluge. But his thoughts were on other matters. He was breezily preoccupied when he bent over the switchboard.

"Hello, there, hon! I'd have been in

before, but I couldn't make it. Say!" He looked furtively about and lowered his voice. His manner was tense with suppressed excitement. "Have you got any dope for me?"

"What do you mean?" asked Nan coldly.

"You know. Say, I've just about got the old boy in a box. I've been working on the thing 'most all day. Now I want you to tell me—"

"Well, I'm not going to tell you anything, Hal Maynard!" said Nan. "So you can just go on wanting."

"Why, Nan!" He jerked back as if she had struck at him.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to ask me to do a nasty thing like that—to listen in to—to things like that. I thought you had more decency—"

"But, Nan, you don't—"

"I thought you were different. That's why I—I liked you. But it's just as bad to go nosing around after bad things as it is to do 'em! And then to try to get me to do your dirty work—"

"But, Nan—"

"I'm not going to tell you anything, so don't ask me! I don't care what *you* do—that's your business!"

"I see. Well, if that's the way you feel, I guess I can get along without your help," he said, and his face was terribly white.

"I guess you will, all right," snapped Nan, lips and nostrils quivering. "I never want to see you again—never."

IV

He stood there for another moment, eyes yearning over her, then he turned on his heel and went off. Nan swallowed hard, moved her head belligerently, and sent up a swift prayer of thanks that no one had witnessed that encounter.

She never did want to see him again. Never. And her conscience was clear. He hadn't got anything out of her. If he made a scandal out of Mr. Finck's perfidy, now, it wouldn't be her fault.

Suddenly she recalled his confident words. Could it be possible that he had learned of that intended rendezvous? But no, how could he, unless some one else—unless Ruthie, perhaps, whom he knew— and Ruthie had no scruples.

Her eyes came to rest on the dainty little beaded bag, and she sighed. Well, at least it would be no fault of hers. If he

did know, there was nothing she could do—nothing. The second time her mind formed the word, there was a large question mark after it.

A moment later she was again studying the location of The Elms in the helpful little guidebook. So The Elms was not far distant from a small place called Sully! And Sully might be reached by rail, if emergency required! She hailed a boy, and sent him to the desk after a Long Island time-table.

It was approaching the dinner hour, and that was a busy hour at the Elite. All these small, personal activities of Nan's were tucked unobtrusively in between the duties of her regular routine. There was no falling off in her efficiency to-night, but she worked like an automaton, cheeks and eyes bright, small mouth pursed determinedly, thoughts racing.

She was supposed to be relieved at eight, but it was with no timidity that she demanded a half hour clipped from this—and ten dollars on account of her salary as well. Workers as capable as Nan know their worth these days.

The half hour and the ten dollars were granted, kindly enough, and seven thirty found Nan speeding on her slender, silk-clad legs toward the railroad terminal and Mr. Finck's aid.

Conscience was the only warm thing about Nan Brian when, some two hours later, she climbed stiffly down on the platform.

It was a very small station, and deserted, save for a couple of parked cars which immediately swallowed up the two other passengers who had come in on the same train, and whirled them off into the night.

Nan watched them go, with a sinking heart. Then she started purposefully off down the dark road toward a small cluster of lights in the distance.

The lights proved to be those of a small town, its streets dismally devoid of life. The frame buildings of what was evidently the Main Street of Sully, creaked and whined in the high wind that seemed to have a tang of salt in it.

After a hesitant moment, Nan turned into the drug store, ordered a hot chocolate, and inquired of the clerk as to the whereabouts of The Elms. He looked at her intently before he explained, pointing with a sticky forefinger:

"You keep right on past the post office, and take the first road to the right."

Nan gulped her chocolate and left. The first road to the right lay half a mile beyond the drug store, but she found it, and started down its dark and rutted length, whipped and lashed by a hard wind that made every step an effort.

It was a bleak road, too, with only a few thin stabs of light from the widely scattered arc lights. These were supplemented, however, by the lights of cars that roared past her at short intervals.

She found herself hoping, as she trudged along, that Mr. Finck would not be so dead to decency and duty as to make her trip a futile one. But perhaps it would be futile, anyway. Perhaps she was too late—but no, they had said midnight.

A sharp turn in the road brought her suddenly upon her objective: one of those pseudo-rustic road houses of rambling structure and forced simplicity. The entrance was a continuation of the road down which she had come, and the name was woven picturesquely in the trellis work above the gate.

Cars were parked in profusion along the well-kept drive, lights blazed from the lower windows, and the whine of a jazz orchestra mingled with what sounded to Nan like the distant booming of surf. She went slowly, shiveringly, up the drive toward this bright oasis in the black night.

As she stood looking uncertainly about, a motor roared toward her, drenching her in white glare, and she sped across the lawn and into the obscurity of the shadows.

Although she was not conscious of having formed any definite idea as to The Elms, she knew now that she had expected some isolated and deserted little inn such as furtive lovers—as she pictured them—would choose for a rendezvous. Instead, here was all the extravagant pageantry of the Hotel Elite itself, and somewhere in there among the lights and music was the erring Mr. Finck.

But how was she to reach him? The movies had taught her that clandestine lovers do not pursue their dark machinations under their own names.

It was the cold, really, that suggested her next move. It seemed to Nan that she never had been so chilled before. She made her way around the house, and past some windows that gave her a glimpse of white-capped chefs and copper kettles. Beyond

these windows she found a door partly swathed in darkness.

She made a dash for this, her heart beating high, an explanation ready in case of detection, and turned the knob. Here was a dimly lit hall, redolent of cooking food, and a narrow staircase leading up at one end. Up the steep stairs she scurried, and around a bend, to find herself in a lighted corridor, a row of numbered doors on either side—a typical hotel corridor.

She was on familiar territory now. She drew a long breath. A medley of clinking dishes and broken laughter and music came up to her faintly. She considered her next move very coolly before she started down the corridor, gently trying the knobs of the closed doors. Three resisted her, the fourth gave to her cautious touch. She knocked softly, and, receiving no response, stepped inside and turned on the light.

As she had supposed, the room was vacant. She stepped across to the mirror, took off her hat, ran a side comb through her shorn locks, and powdered her nose. After that she found the maid's bell and rang it briskly. She felt for all the world like the heroine of some thrilling movie. And she wondered if heroines felt cold, and hot, and bold, and timid, all at once.

The maid who appeared in response to her ring, was an inscrutable young person, as all good hotel maids should be. Nan greeted her, and then, very casually, took two one-dollar bills from her purse. These she folded slowly and methodically as she talked. Not for nothing had Nan spent all those months at the Elite.

"And mind you," she said, in rounding off her little speech, which included a verbal photograph of Mr. Finck, the name of his car, and the probable hour of his arrival, "you don't run any risk. I could get hold of him without your help, only it might take more time, and I'm in a hurry. All you need to do is find out where he is right now, and come back and tell me, see?"

There are few novelties in a hotel maid's life. Nan's request did not surprise this one any more than those casually folded bills impressed her. A bill must have a yellow glint to impress the maids at The Elms. But, of course, this modest bribe was not to be scoffed at, and no one could look at Nan in her young earnestness and connect her with anything which might bring unpleasantness or disaster in the wake of a favor.

"Well," the maid said at last, "you wait here. I'll see if I can find your big boy."

Nan waited, her heart pumping hard the while. Now that the interview was at hand, she was terribly frightened—but the thought of kind little Mrs. Finck lent her stamina. Of Hal she refused to think, although his white face, as she had flailed him, kept riding back into her mind to reproach her.

V

THE maid had been gone nearly fifteen minutes before she returned. Then she said noncommittally:

"Go down those stairs there. They'll take you to the main hall. Turn toward the back. There's some private rooms there. Maybe you'll find some one you know in number three. Anyway, there's an old boy there alone—but he's expecting somebody. Maybe it's you."

The bills changed hands. The maid sauntered off. Her hat still clutched in her hand, Nan went down the stairs.

At first she was confused as to which way to turn. There were so many lights, and so many men strolling about. Finally she turned toward the rear of the house, peering up at the doors as she went.

Her cheeks reddened at the sound of a jovial greeting from a middle-aged gentleman who was not entirely sober. "Hello, there, sweetie!" he said. This was followed by another—"You let little Goldilocks alone. She's looking for me, aren't you?"

Nan took another step forward, and felt a hand on her arm. "I'm the guy she's looking for!" She shook off the hand.

Ah, there was number three—across the hall. She started across, and the man who had called her Goldilocks stepped in front of her: "Here I am, darling!"

"Oh!" shuddered Nan, a sob in her throat, and then—"Oh, Hal!"

"I beg your pardon!" said the Goldilocks gentleman with a low bow.

Hal, who had been hurrying past, was brought up short by that cry. For an instant he stared at her stupidly, and Nan saw an involuntary tenderness rush into his eyes before they became cold.

"Well!" he said, and then: "I beg your pardon! Did you speak to me?"

The other men had turned their backs and were strolling off down the hall, talking among themselves. For the moment they were alone.

"No—yes," stammered Nan. "I mean—those men—you—"

"Don't know *what* to say, do you?" he broke in, scarcely above a whisper, but his eyes and voice were terrible. "You didn't make your private room quite quick enough, did you?" He looked at the hat in her hand.

"Hal! It isn't my—"

"You! With all your fine talk! *Here!* The most notorious place on the Island. Just wanted an excuse to be rid of me, did you?" And then: "Oh, Nan! How could you?"

He was going, hurrying off down the hall, and leaving her there with those terrible men—and thinking those things. But he mustn't! He had not gone half a dozen steps when her hand was clutching his arm.

"Hal! You mustn't think—you've no right to think—I didn't know what kind of a place it was. I came because I thought I ought to, Hal. I thought if I got here in time and talked to him, he'd go back to his wife and children—"

"For Pete's sake!" There was nothing but bewilderment in his face now. "What *are* you talking about?"

"I couldn't bear to think that you'd be willing to make a poor woman suffer just to—just to get a raise. It's such a horrid story—"

Abruptly he took her arm, propelled her along the hall and through a door which he closed behind them. They were on a wide, inclosed porch, occupied by scores of wooden chairs asleep on their faces for the winter. Aside from these, and a low hung yellow moon, and the distant boom of the surf, they were alone.

"Now," Hal demanded. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Why, Hal, don't you see? I wanted to save his wife—she's so sweet, and I know that woman tempted him. I thought I'd warn him—but if you print that story about his being unfaithful—"

"Why, Nan! What on earth—you're talking nonsense. What story are you talking about? Who's been unfaithful?"

She looked at him blankly.

"But, Hal! What are you doing here?"

"I'm eating—at least I'd just finished eating when I bumped into you. How did you find out I'd—"

"But, Hal, I mean—what are you doing down here—way down here, if you—"

"I've been down here ever since I saw

you—over at a wharf not far away. Some friends of mine—dry agents—let me in on a story we thought was going to break to-night, but I guess it has fallen through. I hadn't had any dinner, so I popped over here."

"Then you didn't come so you could catch—"

"I came because I thought we had that man Finck all sewed up, but it looks as if he'd slipped past us again," he said bitterly. "It would have been one of the biggest bootlegging stories since prohibition, too."

"Bootlegging stories!" echoed Nan.

"Yes. What I was telling you the other night. This man, Finck, is the brains and money behind one of the cleverest booze gangs in the country. That was what I wanted you to keep your ears open for—see if you could get us any news. We knew this Priscilla—"

"That's not her name," Nan said mechanically. "It's—"

"The deuce it isn't!" blurted Hal. "She's lying out at Rum Row right now—"

"Rum Row! Why, Hal—she can't be!"

"I guess I know. Laden to the gun-wales, too, with good Scotch, unless they've emptied her, and that's just about what's happened—"

"Hal! Wait!" She gripped his arm hard. "You mean this—this Priscilla isn't a person—a woman?"

"Woman nothing! She's a boat."

"Oh, Hal! And I thought it—I thought—" She began to sob.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Hal, and took her in his arms.

"I might have helped you. I might—"

"There, there," mumbled Hal miserably, beginning to see the light.

"I did listen in this morning. I took it all down." She drew away from him and began to fumble in her purse for those closely written notes. "He was talking to that Du Val woman, but—"

"Say! What—is it here?" He took the paper and leaped across the porch to

where a window threw out a splash of light.

"Is this what they said—exactly?"

"I took it down as they talked—"

"By Jove!" he breathed. "Then we've got him. We've got him this time, sure!"

"But they didn't say anything about—"

"Listen! This means that she was all set to unload to-night, and then the Du Val woman got wind that something had leaked."

"Do the notes say that?"

"Plain as the nose on your face. The Priscilla got cold feet and had Du Val call in Finck for a consultation. She's the go-between, see? Keeps in touch with the ship, and Finck, too. He's the money behind the whole thing, but they've never been able to pin anything on him before." He hugged her jubilantly. "You've done *that*, Nan. He'll be down here cooking up a new scheme to get the stuff in, and with the government boys right here on the spot—"

"Hal! He's here, now. He's in a private room—number three."

"I'll tell the boys. They won't do a thing with this." He waved the paper joyfully, and then he dragged off his overcoat and flung it around Nan. "You sit right down there behind one of those chairs until I get back, hear? Don't go in to that place again. There are plenty of souls in there that need saving, but your services are already contracted for—for life!"

VI

"Say, did you hear that hot stuff between that Morton girl who's staying over here, and our Mr. Toole, to-day?" asked Ruthie of Nan some days later. Nan shook her head.

She was embroidering a capital M on something that looked like a table napkin.

"You didn't? Say, don't you ever listen in?" Ruthie persisted.

"What do I want to listen in for," demanded Nan loftily. "I've got something better to do with my time. I'm going to be married next month."

A GARDEN FANCY

THE rose within the garden said,

"Happy am I that I am red!"

The lily cried, in rapt delight,

"I glory that my bloom is white!"

While my love, red and white of cheek,

Smiled at the flowers, but did not speak.

Clinton Scollard

The Gospel Wagon

HIGH G. DANDY, IMITATION MINISTER, INVADES TICKFALL, BUT
THE REV. VINEGAR ATTS REMAINS UNDISTURBED

By E. K. Means

IT was a warm day in June, when High G. Dandy—known by another name in the prison record—took his unceremonious departure from the penitentiary. A careless guard, who was watching this convict work upon the road beside the high wall, had turned away to get a light for his cigarette.

A white man, driving a cheap truck for the delivery of groceries, slowed down beside the convict, who stood as if he were waiting for some one to ask him to ride to town.

"Goin' down, trusty?" he asked.

"Yes, suh. Sho' glad to git to go," High answered, without a glance to right or left.

The machine roared its farewell and shot down the hill toward the city, a distance of two miles.

But the groceryman did not see his machine again that day. In fact, he never saw or heard of it again. Before the obliging chauffeur was down the hill, he was knocked senseless by a blow upon the head with a monkey wrench.

Half a mile farther along the road, the car was turned into a bypath which led away from the city. Two miles more, and High G. Dandy stopped long enough to exchange clothes with the luckless white man. Then the unconscious driver of the machine was dumped out beside the road, in a well-fitting convict suit, and High G. sped away, clothed like a reputable citizen.

The guard returned to his post of duty to find that he had trusted the "trusty" once too often. He raised the alarm, and searching parties started after the fugitive. About dark, word was received at the prison that the escaped convict had been captured, but was injured and unconscious from a blow upon the head.

The posse was called back, the injured

man was brought in, and identified as the driver of a local groceryman's delivery truck. Night was on, and the search was not renewed until the morning.

High G. Dandy drove for fifteen hours, at an average speed of twenty miles per hour. He purchased gasoline at obscure country stores with money found in the white man's pockets. At early dawn he stopped at a negro church, surveying the spot from the viewpoint of a fugitive seeking a place to hide.

"Dis here place looks good to me," he muttered to himself. "Wonder am I nigh to a town. Dis here graveyard looks populous like dar has been consid'able fun'erals."

He glanced at the road which led up to the church, and noticed the track of other automobiles. Then he boldly ran up into the churchyard, parked his machine in the rear of the sacred edifice, and pushed open a side door.

"Wonder whut I am at?" he mumbled. "Whut kind of meetin'house am dis? Mefdis'? Baptis'?"

Nothing indicated whether the converts of that congregation were immersed in water or merely dry cleaned. In the increased light of the growing day, High G. found something of greater interest in the small room he entered in his exploration—a well-worn couch, the springs broken and resting upon the floor beneath, showing evidence of having been used by a corpulent man, somnolently inclined.

"Dis here is right," High mused in great satisfaction. "De Lawd has pervided his humble servant a secure restin' place in His tabernacle. I sleeps de sleep of de just an' de innercent, an' may de good Lawd perfect me from all my enemies."

He flopped down upon the couch, and was sound asleep in a moment.

Thus High G. Dandy came to Tickfall. He made himself at home at once, taking possession of a room in the Shoofly church, and occupying a couch which was the favorite resting place of the Rev. Vinegar Atts.

No one disturbed his deep slumber during the day. The trout were biting, and Vinegar and most of his congregation were sitting upon the banks of the bayou.

When he awoke, night had come again, and the number of lights visible from the hilltop indicated to the convict that he was upon the edge of some small village. Slipping down the hill, he found a small store owned by a negro and conducted by a stupid girl.

Here he bought food, and ascertained by cunning questions the name of the town in which he was, and the name of the church where he had slept.

"Is you a preacher?" the girl asked.

"Yes'm," High G. answered, becoming a clergyman on the moment. "I preaches—off an' on. Ain't been doin' much preachin' recent."

"De Revun Vinegar Atts is de preacher at de Shoofly church," the girl volunteered. "I figgered dat mebbe you done come to town to he'p Vinegar hold a revival meetin' when you axed about de name of de church."

"Yes'm, I'm is," High G. declared, as he wolfed the cheese and crackers and sardines and sausage and other food he had purchased. "We aims to start our meetin' real soon. Whar am de Revun Atts now?"

"Him an' pap is fishin'," she replied.

"An' whut mought yo' name be, honey?" High asked, as he gazed at the slim girl with thick hair, shallow eyes, flat nose, and face of wooden stupidity.

"Dey calls me Shady Quiet. I ain't been livin' here long. I come from way back to he'p pap keep dis little store."

High G. paid for his food, and as he turned to leave, he said:

"Good-by, Shady! When de Revun Vinegar Atts comes back from fishin', tell him I'm done arrived."

He slept again that night in the Shoofly church, and awoke in the morning feeling that he had absorbed enough theology to announce himself as a full-fledged minister of the Word.

So he drove his stolen truck down to Sawtown, sold it for fifty dollars, bought a new suit of shiny black clothes, purchased a stovepipe hat of ancient vintage from the

grand mogul of a colored lodge, and rode back to Tickfall on the train, introducing himself to all the colored passengers.

"I'm de Revun High G. Dandy, of Tickfall," he declared, smoothly.

II

"YES, suh, de Bible say: 'Go, an' preach,' an' my notion, accawdin' to de law an' de Gawspil, is dat church meetin' houses is a mistake. De church house says: 'Come an' hear me preach'—an' de Bible don't reckernize no sich doin's."

High G. Dandy stood in the middle of the floor in the soft-drink emporium called the Henscratch, and delivered his opinion to the "Big Four" of Tickfall. He was a tall, thin negro, with a coconut head of such formation that one had the impression he could put on his shirt over his head without unbuttoning the collar band. He had long, gorillalike arms, his body was slightly stooped, his shifty eyes were set too close together, and his hair too closely clipped—this last being the only mark of the prison upon him.

"Dat's new Gospel to me," Vinegar Atts remarked as he sat at a table, smoking a cigar and drinking a concoction called rabbit cider. "I been havin' a meetin' house in Tickfall fer twenty-five year, an' you is de fust nigger to raise a kick."

Vinegar once had been a prize fighter, and now most of his strength had turned to fat. He was a large, black, bald-headed, round-faced, jolly, contented old ex-pugilist, who had retired from the ring twenty-five years before. He often remarked that he had stopped pounding his opponent in order to expound the Scriptures. But he was always belligerent, and now he glared at High G. as if about to challenge him to fistic combat.

"Mebbe us niggers didn't know no better, an' you been puttin' somepin over on us," Skeeter Butts asserted, as he adjusted his high collar and fixed his cuffs, and eyed his well-dressed form in the fly-specked mirror beside him.

"Dis feller sounds like he's quotin' Bible, it sounds to me, it do," Figger Bush snapped, popping open his big eyes and raising himself slightly in his chair, his woolly hair standing up like a rooster's comb upon his head. He glared at Vinegar suspiciously. "Churches cost a heap of money, an' mebbe we been spendin' our money foolish."

"I ain't been spendin' much foolish," Pap Curtain, a yellow, monkey-faced negro sneered. "I'm willin' to he'p eve'y year up to my limit, but one dollar is my limit."

"Even dat much hadn't oughter be spent dat way," High G. announced as he pushed his high hat back from his high forehead, raised himself high upon his toes, and from that serene height spat with amazing accuracy into a box of sawdust twenty feet distant. "You meant well, but you wus igernunt."

"Whut is yo' notion of how to do?" Vinegar asked contentiously.

"I advocates a Gawspil wagon," High G. announced.

"Whut am dat? A church on wheels?" Skeeter Butts inquired.

"Naw! It's de message of de Lawd on wheels," High declared. "My notion is to git us a wagon, fix up some seats along de sides, put a little organ up in front, rig up a pulpit at de hind end, git us some singers an' some fellers whut kin blow horns an' some niggers dat kin preach—an' take de message to de people!"

"Lawd! Lawd!" Figger Bush sighed in ecstasy at the vision. "Think of me settin' up in a wagon, blowin' my cornet horn while all yo' niggers is singin' yo' way aroun' dis town."

"Swing lo-o-ow, sweet chariot," Skeeter Butts sang in a high tenor. "I looked over Jordan an' whut did I see? A Gawspil wagon a comin' after me—"

Then every voice chanted the refrain, and the music rolled like the great tones of a majestic organ:

"Comin' fer to carry me home!"

"Brudders, dat am de greatest notion dat is ever struck Tickfall!" Vinegar Atts howled. "I motions dat we peeced at once to organize a Gospel wagon."

"Whar'll we git de wagon?" Figger Bush demanded.

"Marse John Flournoy will lend us de loant of one," Skeeter Butts said, confidently. "I'm Marse John's favoryte nigger, an' I kin git it."

"Who is dis here Flournoy?" High asked.

"He's de sheriff," Skeeter answered.

In spite of every effort at self-control, High's head jerked back as if he had been struck in the face, and it took him a moment to recover from the shock. The negro, having a photographic eye, sees everything; and every man of the four no-

ticed how this simple statement had affected the new evangelist.

"Whar'll we git de organ?" Figger Bush asked next.

"I'll loant de one dat is in de church," Vinegar said. "'Twon't do it no harm to set in de wagon an' play a few simple religium toons."

"Whar we gwine git de mules to pull dat wagon?" Pap Curtain inquired.

"Plenty of niggers is got plow mules," Figger Bush declared. "We kin use 'em at night, an' dey'll be glad to be in on dis. Mules is got a good y-ear fer music."

"Whar kin us git singers?" High asked, having recovered a little from the sheriff's proximity to his plans.

"Hush, revun!" Skeeter said. "We got to keep dis wagon a secret. Eve'y nigger gal in town will crave to ride in dat carry-all an' sing hymn toons. Dazzle Zenor will play de organ, an' I'll be director of de choir."

"I'll blow my cornet hawn," Figger Bush announced.

"I'm a heavy bass," Pap Curtain told them.

"Me an' Vinegar will preach," High said. "Dat fixes us all right. An' de people will bless us, an' de Lawd will bless us, an' we'll do a large amount of great good."

III

THEN, for the next month, Tickfall's colored society saw something new, and the white people were also interested in the Gospel wagon which moved from place to place with its little organ, its choir, and the two preachers.

Tickfall was a village of three thousand persons, and eighteen hundred of them were colored persons. These lived in little settlements around the village, the communities lying about the white portion of the town like pigs around their dam, and drawing their sustenance therefrom. These settlements had picturesque names, Shiny, Tin-Row, Hell's Half-Acre. And from one of these to the other the Gospel wagon moved, pausing sometimes as they traversed the white portion of the town to entertain their white friends by their singing.

Whenever the wagon stopped, High G. Dandy was sure to leap down from the tail-board at some appropriate time and take up a collection, allowing the contributors to drop their money into the crown of his high hat of ancient vintage. Unfortunately, he

had not pursued his present business quite long enough to learn all the language of his sacred calling, so he denominated the pleasurable exercise of collecting the offering as "pickin' de birds."

"Us didn't git nothin' but pinfeathers to-night, Vinegar," he announced disgustingly, as he shook a handful of small change under his comrade's nose. "Look at dese little pickin's."

"De Lawd loves a cheerful giver," Atts agreed. "Me, too. Ef dese here niggers don't shake loose mo' lib'ral, I ain't gwine love 'em any mo' dan I would a wet dawg," Vinegar sighed. "We needs to orate de people on de grace of givin'."

"Dis holy show costs money," High declared. "It's wuth mo' dan' buff'lo nickels an' copper cents. Le's fix up some kind of hoodoo dat will skeer de people into donatin'."

"Now in my church, I do it diffunt," Vinegar said. "Dey got to pay me—I makes 'em."

"How is dat did?" High asked.

"Well, suh, it wucks dis way: de Shoo-fly church is already dar, an' it don't cost nothin'. I'm got a little house whut wus donated by de whites as a home fer de nigger preacher, an' dat don't cost me no rent or taxes or nothin'."

"Dat's fine!" High applauded. "Git on!"

"Stop shovin' me along!" Vinegar said impatiently. "I also has five hundred members of dis church, an' dey is taxed two bits per each month."

"One hundred an' twenty-five bucks per each month!" High G. howled. "Lawd, man! You is rich! Whut does you do ef dey don't pay?"

"I turns 'em out," Vinegar said simply.

"Is dat all de money you gits?" High inquired.

"Naw, suh. 'Tain't all!" Vinegar grinned. "Ev'ry three months, I has a special Sunday. De fust is called Rally Sunday, de secont is called 'Rousement Sunday; de two yuther specials is called Wuck Sunday an' Harvest Sunday."

"Whut does you do on dem days?" High G. asked.

"I takes up a special collection, an' eve'y nigger has to bestow a extray two bits," Vinegar grinned.

"Dat's six hundred dollars extray eve'y year!" High exclaimed.

"Suttinly."

"But I heard Pap Curtain say dat he did not gib but one dollar per each year," High reminded him.

"Dat's right. Pap is not a active member," Vinegar admitted. "Pap is a seat member. I'm got about six hunderd of dem, an' dey pays me one dollar per each per each year."

"Dat's six hunderd dollars mo'!" High remarked excitedly. "Whut does you do wid all dat money?"

"I spends it," Vinegar said calmly.

"Lawd, Lawd!" High exclaimed in wondering admiration.

And then in his covetous soul was born a desire to supplant the Rev. Vinegar Atts as pastor of the Shoo-fly church. It looked to him like an easy way to make a living, and the "pickings" were certainly good.

He went about his task with all the arts and wiles of the politician.

"Fust I'll git de lady folks on my side, den I'll go atter de chillun," he reasoned. "Women an' chillun makes up most of de churches, an' ef I kin swing 'em to me, Vinegar Atts will have to winter wid de out hawks."

Which shows the art of the politician, not the wisdom of the preacher. Every clergyman knows that the stray sheep of the church are always the men. If a woman is at all inclined to be religious, she will go to church and work for the organization. But a man may be equally as religious in inclination, and spend all his time on Sunday fishing in a bayou or watching fighting roosters in a cock pit.

The preacher who can win and hold the men does not need to know the name of a single woman or child in his congregation. The women will follow the men and the children will "go along with the bunch." And Vinegar Atts had a hold upon the hearts of the colored men of Tickfall which had carried him safely through many an effort in the last twenty-five years to "roll him for his job."

High G. Dandy's effort to enlist the women of the church in his behalf merely had the effect of conveying to every man in the Shoo-fly church the information that the new preacher in town desired a permanent establishment.

"Dat new preacher is on yo' trail, Vinegar," Skeeter Butts declared warningly.

"I'll sprinkle a little red pepper in my tracks an' throw dat dawg off de scent," Vinegar said easily.

"All de women folks is warmin' up to High G., Vinegar," Pap Curtain told him. "Dey is talkin' about needin' a change of preachers in de Shoofly."

"I knows it," Vinegar grinned. "But I ain't skeart of no preacher who depends on petticoat popularity. De women folks makes an' breaks. I'm got a hunch dat some woman is gwine be de ruination of High G. befo' he goes too far."

"Is you aimin' to put a cocklebur under his saddle?" Pap asked.

"Somepin like dat," Vinegar said. "He's fightin' me wid de women, an' I aims to hit him wid his own gun."

Thereupon Vinegar went to his office in the Shoofly church and wrote a letter to High G. Dandy. He knew that Dandy was a frequent caller at the little store owned by the father of Shady Quiet. Because of his hunger, Shady was the first girl that High had met in Tickfall, and he had gone back there when prompted by other hunger than a desire for food. It took hours of time for Vinegar to fashion his epistle to his liking. This is the completed effort:

High G Dandy while studyin about you i
thought i would write you a few lines to inform
you of my helth. i am well an hopin you are the
same. dear i just study about you all the time.
corse you ant give out comin down to the store
ar you. miss you and been studyin why you ant
come. if you is plesse write an let me Know so i
will Know What to do. no Swooner than you
write and let me know what you mean an whut
you say an i will ancer. i am all Redy an waitin
untell you ancer. dear hart ef i did ever love enny
one i show do love you. dolling when i get so
i can Look in yo loving smiling face i Will be
better sadfide. i have been longing to get you
for my sweet baby. i think more an more of you
ever Day of life. so good by. i Will remaine
one Kindes

SHADY QUIET.

Vinegar walked down to the little store at the foot of the hill and found Shady Quiet in charge.

"I jes' now writ a little letter to de Revun High G. Dandy fer you, Miss Shady," Vinegar said cordially. "Dis letter won't do you no harm. I think de new elder is lookin' yo' way wid lovin' eyes."

"Mebbe so," Shady giggled.

"De nex' time you see High, don't forget to ax him did he git his letter."

"I won't," the girl said. "He'll be proud to git a letter from me."

"Don't tell him I writ it fer you," Vinegar grinned.

"I shore won't," the girl laughed. "I knows it is a heap better letter dan I could write, but High don't need to know dat."

Vinegar left the store with the envelope, carried it to the post office, and mailed it. As he came out of the building, Sheriff John Flournoy stopped his automobile and beckoned to him.

"Come this way, Vinegar!" he called. "I want you to ride with me a little while!"

"Yes, suh, white folks!" Vinegar answered. "Ridin' in de sheriff's auto shore gibs me high standin' in de cullud circles of Tickfall. Dat is, ef I'm invited to ride, instid of bein' told to git in. Dis here is a invite. I's proud to accept."

IV

For almost two months High G. Dandy had been an inhabitant of Tickfall, making a precarious living by aid of the Gospel wagon, and adding a little to his income by performing sundry odd jobs. Vinegar labored with him in his wagon, in spite of the fact that Dandy was working steadfastly in his campaign to become pastor of the Shoofly congregation.

"We gits along like I would wid a pet bear," Vinegar explained to his friends. "I treats him nice an' watches him."

The tormenting heat of the July nights had come, cotton-growing weather. The colored people, being children of the sun, were at their best, and the meetings around the wagon became larger and more enthusiastic as the torture of the high temperature increased.

The sheriff of Tickfall parish paused upon the edge of the crowd and surveyed the scene before him. The wagon stood upon this night beside the Henscratch soft-drink place. Dazzle Zenor presided at the organ, which stood in the front end of the vehicle, and Skeeter Butts stood beside her, directing the music.

Seats built along the sides of the wagon accommodated eight singers, among whom was Shady Quiet. At the rear stood a rude pulpit desk, beside that a gasoline torch, and seated near the pulpit were the officiating clergymen, High G. Dandy and Vinegar Atts.

There were hundreds of women around the wagon, but High G. Dandy could see only one, and she sat in the wagon—Shady Quiet. And Shady had eyes only for Dandy. Their love affair had become the talk of the colored people of the village,

and the women did not hesitate to say that when High G. presided over the church, Shady would be presiding likewise over the parsonage.

As the sheriff paused, Figger Bush was preparing to render an instrumental solo on his "cornet hawn." He felt the importance of his position in the scheme of things, and he tried to make every living thing in town hear that horn. Possessing marvelous lung capacity, the operator made his cornet shriek and wail until the listener could not hear himself think.

Flournoy was disgusted.

"Old fool!" he muttered. "Got his woolly head parted in the middle, and the part made by a razor. Trying to commit suicide by blowing his brains out with that horn. Can't do it, because he hasn't got any brains!"

Flournoy lingered just long enough after that to hear the famous Tickfall quartet sing. Like all negro music, it was in a minor strain, but the great voices of the men carried a mighty inspiration.

"Temptations, hidden snares, often take us un-
awares,
And our hearts are made to bleed for each
thoughtless word or deed.
And we wonder why the test when we try to do
our best,
But we'll understand it better by and by."

When the quartet ended, High G. Dandy arose to speak. In the two months past, he had added a little to his equipment. He now wore gold-rimmed glasses which contained excellent window glass so as not to interfere with his vision. His feet were incased in spats—he had purchased them from an actor in a company which had recently appeared in Tickfall at the moving picture house.

And as the popular and beloved white clergyman of Tickfall, Dr. Sentelle, always used a manuscript in his preaching, Dandy had endeavored to qualify as the colored clergyman of the village by using the same method of public speech.

He now unrolled about forty pages of a clumsily written manuscript, drew near to the flickering gasoline torch, and began to read. Feeling for his handkerchief in the tail pocket of his clergyman's coat with one hand, he let the pages slip from the other, and they were scattered upon the bed of the wagon.

He gathered them hastily, but he had failed to number the pages, so he arranged

them as he picked them up and read each page as he came to it, and there was a noticeable lack of sequence to his ideas, such ideas as they were.

It was well for High G. that he had passed the hat before he began his discourse, for the people were not in favor of this mode of public speech. Vinegar Atts belonged to the bull-roaring school of oratory, "sound and fury, signifying nothing"—and the people had not come to the Gospel wagon to be read to.

Two little boys were in the crowd—a white youth named Org Gaitskill and a negro boy called Little Bit. Their presence in any spot was an omen that the unexpected might happen at any moment.

Org carried a giant firecracker twelve inches long and two inches in diameter, a noise maker overlooked and left from a big celebration of the Fourth of July in the Gaitskill home two days before.

It seemed to Org and Little Bit that this would be a good time to explode this firecracker and liven things up a little bit. They crawled under the wagon, placed the explosive upright, lighted the fuse from a burning cigar stump which some smoker had recently dropped, and then they got out from under to await results.

"Stay with me, Little Bit," Org urged, as they backed against a house across the street. "I bet there is going to be some proceedings."

Their expectations were fully realized. When the cannon cracker exploded, the sleeping mules woke up and jumped about twenty feet from the spot where they were standing. The crowd surged from the point of danger like a great black wave, the backwash of the sea. When the mules moved, the wagon went also, and radical changes took place in that vehicle.

First, the organ tipped over, and Dazzle Zenor, who sat upon the piano stool, fell backward in the bed of the wagon. In her effort to get up, she lay clawing and kicking like a raccoon flat on its back. Every man and woman seated along the sides of the wagon either went over the side upon the ground, or went sprawling down in the bed of the wagon, where one gentleman was accidentally kicked in the face by a lady friend.

Vinegar Atts pitched out of his chair upon the ground, striking upon a rotund stomach and rolling like a barrel into a ditch beside the sidewalk. High G. Dandy

clawed at his pulpit desk and found it an insecure support, for it rocked outward and fell over the tailboard of the wagon upon the ground. Then he seized the upright standard of the gasoline torch and wrenched it from its moorings and sent it tumbling out upon the ground.

Then, waving his arms like a distracted rooster trying to fly, he pitched forward himself, landing with both feet in the crown of his beloved high hat which lay wrong side up on the ground. The hat popped like a tambourine in a negro minstrel show, and became part of the junk in the world's heap of things which are not as they were.

High stepped off his hat, and his foot rested upon his eyeglasses with the gold rims and the black ribbon attached, and these also went the way of discard and total loss.

The mules, having made the first jump, repeated. They jumped away from there at a high rate of speed.

Org and Little Bit, discussing the matter later, decided that they were "doin' sixty" when they turned the nearest corner, hung the wagon upon a telephone pole, and spilled out what few persons still lingered in the Gospel wagon. The wagon was a complete wreck.

But no matter. Its mission in Tickfall was ended.

V

WHEN the whooping, howling, laughing spectators had departed to their homes, High G. Dandy went back to the place where the catastrophe had occurred and searched every foot of the ground around the spot with an electric flash light. He was looking for a certain letter, and his failure to find it filled him with hopelessness and despair.

It was not the letter which was signed with the name of Shady Quiet. It was one which had been received that very day, and which he had placed in the crown of his hat while he read his manuscript to the people. He had noticed that Dr. Sentelle carried all valuable papers in his hat.

"Whar kin dat letter be?" he sighed, as he mopped the cold sweat from his brow. "Ef I don't find it, I'm sure goin' to be ruint."

In that moment of great despair, he was able to visualize every minute detail of what had occurred after the explosion.

He had picked up his wrecked hat, his

broken eyeglasses, and the scattered pages of his manuscript. Then he had seen Shady Quiet lying in a heap, and had lifted her to her feet. She had stooped to pick up a hand bag and a hymn book, and—yes, he had seen her pick up an envelope and place it between the covers of the hymn book. In the excitement, she may have thought it belonged to her, fallen from between the pages of the book.

Alas, this letter, if in the hands of Shady Quiet, was in possession of the last person on earth he would want to have it. High sat down upon the curbstone and mournfully considered the wreck of all his hopes and plans and ambitions. Then he arose and began to walk. Mile after mile, in the darkness of the night, he marched like a soldier while he tried to think his way out of the predicament into which he had been precipitated when he fell from the tailboard of the Gospel wagon.

His problem was this: he had a friend in the penitentiary, the only one who knew his real name, with whom he had often discussed the possibility of escape at such times as he was permitted to talk to his fellow convict at all. They had often planned to make their get-away together, but he had been assisted by pure chance, and had left his friend in the "stir." Now his comrade had made a successful escape, and in some way had learned of his location and had written to him.

That was the letter he had lost; and when Shady Quiet read it, it would convey to her that he was not a preacher, but an escaped convict. This would end his residence in Tickfall, conclude his career of imposture as a preacher, stop all his cherished plans to become the clergyman at the Shoofly church, and forever terminate his hope to marry Shady Quiet.

Restlessly, he walked. If he stopped for a moment in indecision, his feet were twitching with the impulse to go on. But he was not unaware of the road he was traveling. He was taking at every turn the way which would bring him back to Tickfall by the break of day. He would be seen in that town just once more.

"Dis here is positively my las' public appearance," he announced to himself as he entered the village. He was feeling better now, for he had found a way out of his difficulties.

He gathered up all his little possessions, preparing for immediate departure. Then,

about noon, he went to the Shoofly church to see Vinegar Atts.

"Come in, brudder!" Vinegar greeted him cordially. "Our Gospel wagon is done turned to a dump cart now. Whut ails yo' mind?"

Dandy sat down at the table beside Vinegar and began:

"Revun, I'm come to beg yo' parding an' to ax you good-by."

"Huh!"

"I been callin' myself a preacher, an' I ain't no sort of a preacher."

"I knowed dat fack all along," Vinegar assured him. "You didn't know how to speak de langwidge of de saints. Whut else is you did?"

"I'm escaped away from de pen recent," High G. told him.

"I knowed dat, too," Vinegar said. "I tuck a automobile ride wid de sheriff, an' he told me who you wus an' whar you come from. He didn't take you up because dar wus another nigger got out recent, an' de sheriff has been expectin' dat you two jail-birds would git together an' he could nab you bofe. He tole me to keep a eye on you an' tell him ef another strange coon showed up."

"You shore did keep still about it," High declared in admiration.

"Suttinly. I ain't said nothin' about de way you is been tryin' to bump me offen my job, either," Vinegar agreed. "At fust I figgered dat I would wuck you out of town by gittin' you in a love scrape wid a woman, but when de sheriff tipped me off, I jes' laid low an' waited."

High sighed deeply and busied himself in lighting a cigarette.

"Whut you gwine do now?" Vinegar asked.

"Well, suh, I rambled around all night thinkin' dat out," Dandy replied. "I ain't no preacher, but it's done me a powerful lot of good to try to preach. I done found out some things dat I ain't know befo'."

"Whut?" Vinegar inquired.

"I'm found out dat a nigger whut don't live right is a fool. I'm learnt dat ef a nigger does wrong, he's got to pay fer it. I'm kotch on to dis: de only way to be happy an' to feel safe is to go right an' be right an' do right. Dat Gawspil wagon is done converted me."

"Amen!" Vinegar exclaimed. "Dem is good Gospel idears. But you axed me good-by. Whar is you gwine?"

"I'm gwine right straight back to dat prison an' gib myself up," Dandy told him. "I wus sont to de pen fer four years fer stealin' hogs, an' I'm got one mo' year in dar befo' my sentence is out. I'm gwine back an' serve it out, an' den I aims to go straight."

"Whut you plan to do when you git out?" Vinegar inquired.

High reached for the old ragged cap which had superseded his stovepipe head-piece, and fitted it in its place. He walked to the door, gazed out at the blazing sunshine, and turned with a grin to face Vinegar.

"Mebbe I'll buy me another high hat an' git me another call to preach," he replied. "I ain't none too good, an' none too proud an' stuck-up to try dat job agin."

He walked down the hill and entered the store where Shady Quiet sat upon a counter munching an apple.

"Shady," he said quietly, "I seed you pick up a letter las' night when de Gawspil wagon had a blow-out. You put dat letter in de hymn book you toted. I wants it now."

The girl took another bite from the apple, reached behind her on the shelf, and handed Dandy the hymn book. High opened it, took out the letter, and handed the book back.

The girl took another bite of the apple.

High opened the envelope, took out the letter, tore it into tiny bits, and scattered the fragments along the floor.

"Huh!" Shady muttered. "You ack like you don't think much of dat letter."

"I don't," High said, and his tone was bitter.

"I don't keer nothin' about letters neither," Shady remarked. "You got one love letter from me, but de Revun Vinegar Atts writ it. I ain't never had no eddication, an' I cain't read or write nothin'!"

"Shady, does you keer for marryin' wid de right man?" he demanded softly.

"Sure I does," was the prompt answer. "Eve'y gal do, too."

"Will you wait a yeah fer me while I'm away on privut business?"

"Uh-uh. Dat's only from one cotton-pickin' time to another."

"It's all of twelve months, Shady," he warned her.

"Dat so? I thought it was fo'teen months make a yeah!"

Then she took another bite of her apple.

Mr. Huddle and the Miracle

A CERTAIN LITTLE PAGAN GOD MINGLES WITH THE CHRISTIAN SAINTS TO STALK HIS UNSUSPECTING QUARRY

By Charles Divine

MR. HOWARD HUDDLE, the choir leader of the Allenville Episcopal Church, left his little frame house and walked thoughtfully across the grass toward the bridge.

First he passed the poplar pole, on top of which perched the bird house whose doorsill was occupied by a decently behaved wren. As he strolled by, the wren seemed to look at her landlord with a friendly eye.

Next, Mr. Huddle came to the rustic bench. He always looked at it in passing, but he almost never sat down on it to rest; its back bore the testimony, in letters and heart-shaped designs, that in Allenville were young men with initial-carving jack-knives and sweethearts. Mr. Huddle had neither. Therefore, he always passed by the bench with a wistful look.

The sight of it to-day caused him to slacken his thoughtful stride, reminding him of what was so lacking in his life. To-day, more than ever before, his heart felt sadly old.

For a dozen years now, although he was still young, he had been coming along this path to the swinging footbridge every summer. The sign on the cement archway told him to use the bridge at his own risk. It was about the only risk he did take in life, he reflected with sudden surprise.

Quiet, dignified, and reserved, he had dwelt here in the Catskills in a kind of cloistered beatitude, alternating school teaching with choir leading.

As he stepped onto the bridge it swayed and swung beneath his feet. It made him feel as if he were walking in the thickly cushioned slippers he wore at home in his music room.

His was a tall, rather lean figure, tightly incased in a black coat that was old and

a little shiny. It fitted him like a shell, symbolically appropriate, for he did indeed live in a shell, a shell of sober, decorous existence.

Under the broad brim of his felt hat his earnest brown eyes surveyed the world rather dully to-day. The rushing stream of water below in the creek, flooded from the recent rains, drew no glance from him.

His narrow face peered straight ahead. A man had to be unusually intent on his thoughts to walk across the undulations of that bouncing suspension bridge without heeding his surroundings. Mr. Huddle never saw them.

For one thing, there was the problem of an organist for to-morrow, Sunday's, services. The young man who had served the church in that capacity had decided to go to the town of Catskill to drive a taxi. There was more money in shifting gears on the Sabbath day than in pumping organ pedals.

Yet music could transport people farther than gasoline. Mr. Huddle knew that. He smiled faintly at the thought.

At the end of the bridge he followed a path among the trees until he came to the sign:

PINE GROVE INN

No Trespassing. This Way Out

"I'd never have any intention of trespassing there," he told himself, turning away at once. He didn't like the ugly, yawning mouths on the veranda of this summer resort, nor the sight of dumpy girls in khaki breeches.

It was a relief to reach the main road of the village and turn his face westward, in the direction of the church.

Above him loomed the shaggy, green-coated mountains, glorious mounds of

bright enchantment piled against the sky. Once he had thought he could be content forever in this environment, but now a sense of disappointment filled him, a sense of his loneliness.

He was too young to bury himself in solitary confinement here! He had walked this road too often without company, and sadly, never with one who could be his confidant, companion, and wife.

His dream of the existence of such a person had become a despondent speculation rather than a hope. What he saw around him depressed him; he could never take to his heart a dumpy young woman in khaki breeches!

Passing the Allenville garage, he noticed a large automobile near which paced a man and two women, evidently tourists, impatient and rather bored, while from under the car protruded the legs of a mechanic. That was a common sight on the road. Mr. Huddle knew all the garages by their mechanics' legs.

He turned his gaze to the pine grove farther along on the left, the sight of which was refreshing. There stood the church, a little, high-gabled structure of field stone, cool, quiet, and aloof.

From the summer sunlight of the road he turned into the shady path among the pines, a path which led to the church door and came back in a loop, tracing a course that left a heart-shaped inclosure of grass. Among the trees the church stood sequestered, like a precious stone in a beautiful setting. He loved it; it was simple and sincere.

He sighed wearily as he paused on the steps to search for his keys. He didn't feel like selecting the hymns and mapping out the song services for the coming week, alone in the empty church this afternoon. Besides, there would be no organ music tomorrow to inspirit him, to lift him out of the loneliness he would feel, even in the presence of a familiar congregation.

He thought of his brother who, not content with the quiet life up-State, had gone to New York to sell bonds and live in the midst of millions of swarming people.

Listlessly he unlocked the door and stepped into the dim interior of the church, into which the summer day filtered only faintly, twice distilled through pine trees and stained glass windows. He was just about to pass the baptismal font when suddenly he stopped.

At that moment he had the look of an elderly, startled faun.

II

He heard the organ abruptly begin to sound. Here, at the back of the church, he stood as stock-still as the belfry rope hanging beside the white plaster wall, on which it cast a rigid shadow. The organ stood at the other end, only a dozen pews away, beside the altar, its bench hidden from view by soft red curtains hanging in the gothic arches of the wooden screen.

One curtain was slightly pulled aside, and through the aperture, toward which Mr. Huddle strained his eyes, he saw the head and shoulders of a young woman seated at the organ.

"This—this," he said to himself, "is amazing!"

The young woman's hands were at play upon the keys, hidden from his sight, but there was nothing invisible about her effect on him. First he stood astounded, and then entranced.

Never before had he heard such beautiful music come out of that old organ, which had been given to the church years ago by the rich Mrs. Pell Van Skiver, whose daughter, Mrs. Myron Sandhammer, had contributed the stained glass windows.

Mr. Huddle took a step nearer and came to another decision. Never before had he seen such an attractive young woman seated at that organ.

He took another step, and reached another decision. Never before had he seen such an attractive young woman seated at any organ.

Another step, and another decision: never before had he seen such an attractive woman anywhere, seated or standing!

He sank into a pew and listened.

From a Bach prelude the music melted into a Franck chorale, bringing to his ears such subtleties of cadence that he knew they must call for the deft employment of diapason bass, bourdon, hautboy, treble, *vox humana*, and all those stops flanking the double keyboard at either side.

Next the music drifted into something which spoke to all the longing and loneliness in his soul. He leaned forward eagerly, his thin hands pressed tensely between his knees, a rapt expression on his face.

Then the music ceased, and a throbbing stillness filled the air under the crisscross rafters of the roof.

At once Mr. Huddle arose and hurried up the aisle so quickly that he tripped over a footstool.

"Oh, don't let me frighten you!" he said, recovering himself. Pushing aside the red curtains, he leaned forward toward the young woman.

"Beautiful!" he announced, meaning the music she had just played; but he was looking at her as he said it, noting her dark, long-lashed eyes, her wide brow, the whole oval of her face, and the lustrous black hair that pressed closely and simply to the shape of her head.

Only a beautiful girl would have dared to wear her hair drawn back in that fashion; but here, as Mr. Huddle soon found out, was a girl who dared to do many things.

"I didn't know I had an audience," she returned, surprised and smiling. The smile did something to Mr. Huddle: it made his heart beat fast. Her eyes surveyed him frankly. "Are you the rector here?"

"No. I'm only the choir leader, Mr. Huddle."

"I am Consuelo Pierson."

She thought that there was an undeniable sedateness in his manner, but also something quite nice in his face. It interested her; his brown eyes seemed to be trying to tell her something so earnestly that their message was confused.

"I hope you don't mind," she remarked. "It's a lovely church, set here among the pines, and as soon as I saw it I couldn't resist the temptation to come in. And then when I got inside—"

"But the door was locked!" Mr. Huddle was bewildered.

"I climbed through a window."

Dumfounded, he followed her gesture to the stained glass panel behind her, swinging on a slide hinge. He gasped. She had come right through St. Peter and the other saints! It was Mrs. Sandhammer's particular window! It wasn't the kind of a miracle with which most of the congregation were acquainted within these walls.

"You—you didn't break anything?" he stammered.

"No. I wouldn't think of harming church property."

"I mean, arms or legs?"

"No." She swung one foot out from under the bench. "You see, I have arrogantly long legs."

Mr. Huddle blushed.

"And once inside," she continued, "I fell in love with the rich tones of this old organ. It's ancient, but articulate, even if the ivory keys are discolored. The marks look like cigarette stains, don't they?"

Mr. Huddle caught his breath at the unexpected simile, but he couldn't deny its aptness.

"You—you play a great deal?" he asked.

"Yes. That's my work. But usually it's the piano I play." She got up from the bench, and then Mr. Huddle saw the big picture hat which had lain beside her. He moved back to let her pass into the aisle, and fell into step with her as she started toward the door. "What time is it, please?"

He fumbled with his tight coat.

"Twenty after three," he replied.

"Oh! The car must be ready by now."

"You—you must go?"

"Yes. We were motoring through on our way to Maverick when the car broke down. I left my friends at the garage and came over here. Country churches intrigue me, and I make friends with old organs the way some people do with stray cats. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

He did. Moreover, he was sorry she was leaving, he said.

"Then you won't be here in Allenville to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid not." She smiled. Something she saw in his face made her ask: "Why?"

"The organist has left. There's nobody to play for the service to-morrow. I promised the rector I'd try to arrange some kind of a musical program. I was thinking that you—you might play—that is—"

He paused in some anxiety.

"That's an idea!" She seemed to be considering it, as well as Mr. Huddle's face, at the same time. He was handsome, she decided, in a certain strangely restrained manner that appealed to her, as if he had deliberately pinched his face with years of sober thought, as if he had lived in fear of his natural endowment.

"I'd love to play," she admitted at length, "but I'll be in Maverick to-morrow, and I have no car."

He knew that many artists and musicians from New York spent the summer at Maverick, which was only sixteen miles away.

"I could come for you in my Ford," he suggested, and waited anxiously, while he

felt her dark gaze looking levelly into his eyes.

"All right. I'll come!"

She told him where he could find her in the summer colony where she was staying, and then, lingering a moment at the door, she asked:

"Were you planning to play the organ yourself? Is that why you came here to-day—to practice?"

"No. I was going to go over the vocal selections—to see what I could pick out of the books."

"Well," she said, turning to go, "I hope my music has given you an inspiration."

"It has—you have," he declared, and the next moment watched her go lightly down the path through the pines, while he felt his heart beating so violently that it was a wonder his coat didn't burst.

"If I'd waited a hundred years," he said to himself, elated, "I couldn't have found a lovelier girl!"

III

To Mr. Huddle, that Sunday morning ride into Maverick in his prim little Ford was like a journey into a bizarre land. He had never ventured into that community so thoroughly before.

In their costumes these New Yorkers revealed a barbaric love of color which he knew would have startled the Rev. Mr. Lingley's congregation. They gave Mr. Huddle himself some uneasiness.

What if Consuelo Pierson should come to the church to-day in something like that? In one of those combinations of brilliant pieces of cloth which were usually associated with regatta time on the Grand Canal in Venice or a bull fight in Spain!

And yet, mused Mr. Huddle, the hues were from the same palette as those which made up the stained glass windows.

He passed a swimming pool whose rim was lined with gay adults in bathing suits, and, after stopping to inquire his way at a house where he received courteous directions from a man with his purple blouse open on an unashamed neck and his head overwhelmed in a flappy tam-o'-shanter made of sacking, he drove up at length to Mrs. Rankin's house, where Consuelo was staying. He saw and heard a man sitting on a log under an apple tree, playing a cello.

He breathed easier when Consuelo came out of the house and climbed into the seat

beside him. She was dressed simply, in a pale gray dress that enhanced the beauty of her dark head.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that we can't pay you for playing the organ."

"You don't have to tell me that."

"I didn't think so," he agreed.

She smiled, and announced:

"I hope to be sufficiently repaid by your company."

That put a great burden on him, he felt. He tried his best to bear it all the way to Allenville, and when he sat in the church listening to Consuelo's playing of the organ, watching the light from the stained glass window that shed itself like an aura about her head, he was sure no other young woman could move him as she did. It was, indeed, a miracle that had come through that panel of Peter and the other saints.

Consuelo sat where the red curtains hid her from the view of the congregation, but Mr. Huddle could see her. The sense of disappointment which had filled all his thoughts on Saturday, before his meeting with Consuelo, did not now oppress him. His heart no longer felt sad or old.

He got up and led a hymn called "The Power of Love." It was surprisingly effective; it even awoke Mrs. Pell Van Skiver, who had been dozing in her pew; and to a deeply analytical listener it might have presented nice points of distinction as to whether he was singing about spiritual or earthly love.

Afterward he received the congratulations of the rector, the congregation, and then Consuelo.

"I believe," she said in a low voice, "that you *did* get an inspiration!"

There was no doubt about it in Mr. Huddle's mind. As the weeks passed, and he saw Consuelo frequently, either in Maverick when he went to call on her at the Rankins' house, or in Allenville, where he brought her to play the organ on Sundays, he came to a definite and exciting conclusion about her.

She was the one who could be confidant, companion, and wife to him—if she would! Only, he didn't dare to ask her, fearing that she didn't feel toward him as he did toward her.

She dwelt in a world of artistic people, who evidently found it less difficult to talk about life, and love, and themselves, than he did. In Maverick he had made the acquaintance of several men and women who

could converse freely and autobiographically, even analyzing themselves aloud. Mr. Huddle couldn't do that.

It was this very restraint which piqued Consuelo and caused her to have many fits of abstraction, during one of which Mrs. Rankin asked her:

"Consuelo, my dear, are you in love with Howard Huddle?" Mrs. Rankin, lounging in a canvas deck chair near the porch rail, was a large woman, pleasant-faced and agreeable, who was eager to voice any skepticism. "He seems too quiet for you."

Consuelo did not answer the question directly. She replied:

"Seems—but is he?"

All her thinking, all her pondering on the restraint in Howard's character, led her to decide to take an unusual step. He had called her entrance into the church a miracle, but to her there was a greater miracle possible. In order to test it she asked Mrs. Rankin to give a party and invite Howard.

"All right, my dear," said Mrs. Rankin.

Her husband, who sat near by repairing a string on his cello, lifted his bald head and puckered brows and inquired:

"Howard Huddle? If he comes, will he wear that coat?"

"The coat's all right," Consuelo assured him. "But I want to find out what's underneath. What's inside his shell."

"How will you do it?" inquired Mrs. Rankin.

"Oh, with music and dancing," replied Consuelo, "and excitement."

"All for a school-teacher?"

"Of course I'd like to see the shell crack a little. I have a theory that the stimulation of a gay party makes clever people cleverer, and stupid people stupider, and mean people meaner. But if anybody's really nice, it won't rob them of their character; and it may enhance it."

IV

AND so it was decided that the Rankins should give a party on Thursday night of the following week. An invitation was duly dispatched to Mr. Huddle. He received it at the village post office with his usual weekly copy of the *Educational Review*. Joe, the clerk, smiled at him amiably as he smelled of the thick, deckle-edged envelope before handing it to him.

What made Mr. Huddle accept the invitation was that in one corner of the page

Mrs. Rankin had scribbled a line to the effect that Consuelo would be there.

On the night of the party Mr. Huddle took especial care with his dress. Pressing made his coat a little more shiny, of course, but it helped his trousers to assume a crease sharp enough to have cut the pages of the *Educational Review*.

He was astonished upon arriving at the Rankins' house to discover that the party was a costume one. It also was a surprise to Mr. and Mrs. Rankin.

They had merely sent out word that they were giving a party this evening, without any thought of special dress, but some members of the summer colony had suddenly thought it would be fun to adopt fantastic garb for the occasion. It was a common enough failing among these people, but to Mr. Huddle it was bewildering.

He found himself in sober black in the midst of colorful confusion, moving perplexed among temporary Turks, Persian ladies with talcum-powdered arms, and Egyptians for a night.

At first he was introduced to two or three persons, and then he was left to drift for himself. He drifted helplessly, seeing no trace of Consuelo.

From veranda to living room to kitchen flowed the crowd noisily and familiarly, for everybody knew everybody else—except Mr. Huddle. To him this glittering, alien gayety was an uncharted sea. He floundered badly.

Nowhere did he catch sight of Consuelo. At length, when he could endure it no longer, he sought out Mrs. Rankin and asked where Consuelo was.

"I don't know," she replied. "She was here awhile ago, but I haven't seen her since."

At one end of the big living room a phonograph was playing unheard in the fracas of voices. At the other end, near the fireplace with its rounded arch, two men who looked like Arab sheiks from some sheeted desert were trying to effect a working arrangement between an accordion and a guitar. Their success resulted in a jazz tune which drew the Persian ladies dancing across the floor in the arms of the temporary Turks, Egyptians at grip with Pierrots, and Aztecs in the anachronistic embrace of modern Andalusians.

Mr. Huddle found himself in a corner where he could sit down and be lonely alone, but a moment later a voice sounded

at his elbow, and he looked up to see a slim, bob-haired girl observing him. She was dressed in a multitude of muslin.

"Oh, what a marvelous costume!" she exclaimed as she sank into a seat beside him. "You look just like a choir master! It's perfect. Even the expression on your face."

At first Mr. Huddle felt stunned. Then he managed to smile.

"Not bad, is it?" he inquired.

"On the contrary, it's the most successful costume here. Where'd you get the trick coat?"

"Oh, I—I found it around home."

"Come on, let's dance? Don't you want to?"

Mr. Huddle went whirling around the floor, clutched by the girl in muslin. Yet all the while he was peering about for Consuelo. He wanted to dance with her, and to talk with her.

When the music stopped he sat down with his partner on the stairs leading to the rustic balcony above the heads of the dancers. A Turk stepped over them and clambered up the stairway, whence his voice drifted back in surprise.

"Hello, Consuelo! What are you hiding here for?"

"Oh, just observing."

Mr. Huddle also knew surprise, and a pang of jealousy, as he looked up and saw Consuelo talking with the Turk. In a dinner dress of some pale mauve stuff she looked more radiant than he had ever seen her before, and he wondered desperately why she had been absent so long and why she hadn't greeted him yet. He could not realize that she had kept out of his sight, for experimental purposes, to see what would happen to him if cast adrift on this sea of light and sound and movement.

As soon as he saw Consuelo rid herself of the temporary Turk, who was evidently trying to make himself permanent around her, he made haste to climb the stairway to the balcony.

"I've been looking all evening for you, Consuelo," he told her. "Won't you sit beside me here on the top step?"

The long deprivation of her company made him speak more eagerly now, as if he hadn't seen her in weeks and weeks, and so had a great deal to tell her. The music floated up to them, and there was a chorus of voices calling to one another.

Mr. Huddle found, somehow, that he

could talk more freely to Consuelo now, and that the difficulties of being brave and autobiographical were not insurmountable, after all. There was a kind of intoxication in the scene. He was just beginning to taste this new freedom when the girl in muslin reappeared at the bottom of the stairway and called up to him.

"I don't suppose I can get you away from Consuelo long enough for another dance."

He shook his head.

"Not even with a derrick," he replied boldly.

"Well," returned the girl admiringly, "I like your disguise, anyway. You're a sweet thing, and you shake a wicked foot!"

The girl drifted away. Consuelo gave her companion an appraising glance, deciding that there certainly was a change in him.

"Howard," she said, "you haven't had anything to drink, have you?"

"Only a glass of water."

"Some outsiders have come into the party—Mrs. Rankin doesn't know from where—and they've brought something to drink with them. There they are"—she pointed to the far end of the room—"and it's disgusting."

At that point Consuelo arose, and Mr. Huddle followed her down the stairs to the big room, where Mrs. Rankin came up, saying:

"You can't even hear yourself think any more; there's so much noise from those people who crashed the gate!"

Consuelo went away with Mrs. Rankin, who wanted help in searching for her husband, or any other man who could help clear the atmosphere.

Mr. Huddle was left alone again for a few moments, and when next he caught sight of Consuelo she was in a far corner trying to repel one of the men, the same Turk who had been so persistent in seeking her company on the balcony, and who was now emboldened to embrace her.

V

A GLEAM came into Mr. Huddle's earnest brown eyes. There was little of the school-teacher's restraint in the words he muttered under his breath. And in the great strides he suddenly took across the room there was little of the gait of a peripatetic philosopher.

Excited, and with a flushed face, he made his way through the throng of fan-

tastic figures as surely as a swift cloud shadow in a sunny field. In front of Consuelo he pushed aside the arms of the unfortunate Turk, and there was even less of the school-teacher in him as he announced firmly:

"If anybody kisses her to-night, it's going to be me—I mean!"

Although greatly agitated, Mr. Huddle was within his rights in correcting his own grammar, but the Turk did not accord him the same rectifying privilege as regards his behavior. In fact, he distinctly resented it, not only with vehement words, but with the gesture of a lifted arm.

At that moment something happened inside of Mr. Huddle—something sharp and burning which caused his arm to draw back, his fist to double up—and he hit the Turk a blow which smacked more of the prize ring than the choir loft.

The Turk went down with "Hark! The herald angels sing!" or some similar ringing sound in his brain. Friends picked him up and carried him outside to get the air, while Consuelo stood gazing at Mr. Huddle, dumfounded.

"Why, Howard!" she exclaimed.

He felt a painful spiritual reaction. With the realization of what he had done, there came an overwhelming sense of shame, a feeling that he had disgraced himself forever, as well as having burst three buttons off his coat.

He hurried out of the room in a daze, carrying in his mind the picture of Consuelo's dark eyes fixed upon him. He left the house and was scarcely aware that he was driving his little car along the road toward home.

He, a peaceful, law-abiding citizen, a teacher, a choir master, supposedly civilized and not entirely uncultured, loving the finer things in life—he had sunk to the brutish level of knocking one of his fellow men down! He remembered hearing Consuelo say that the behavior of some of the people was disgusting.

What would she think of it now? And of him! He gripped the wheel tighter and sent the car bouncing giddily over the road.

VI

THE next day was Saturday, and Mr. Huddle wandered about his house in despair, tormented by the thought that he had lost Consuelo forever. She had held herself immaculately aloof from the brawl-

ing atmosphere in which he had played such a despicable part.

He had a feeling of guilt when he went to the church to prepare the song service for Sunday. What would the rector say if he knew how he had behaved the night before? Had any of the congregation heard of it? He wondered now how he had ever dared to do what he did.

Well, from now on he would sink back again into the rut of quiet and loneliness; to-morrow he would conduct the singing in its usual manner, and again, as before, he would know no Consuelo. No more would he drive over to Maverick early on Sunday morning to bring her back with him. The organ would remain silent, and his heart heavy. It was his just punishment.

The members of the congregation took their accustomed seats in their customary way on Sunday morning. Nobody seemed to glance at Mr. Huddle reproachfully, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He saw old Mrs. Pell Van Skiver let herself down into her pew with the usual amount of caution, and, preparatory to dropping asleep, nod at the rector and then at him. Mrs. Sandhammer, with her nieces and nephews, occupied the Sandhammer pew in the glow of a Sandhammer stained glass window.

But there was one window whose jeweled light fell on an empty bench, the organist's, which Mr. Huddle looked at disconsolately from time to time. Through St. Peter had come the miracle of Consuelo, and now he could never sit here near the red curtains without being reminded of it.

"Mr. Huddle looks pale to-day," whispered one of the nieces to the majestic Mrs. Sandhammer.

"Hush! It's very becoming," replied Mrs. Sandhammer.

At length Mr. Huddle stood up to make his announcement, and the talking and rustling ceased like a wave of silence rolling back from the carpeted steps to the belfry rope hanging against the back wall.

"Again we are without an organist," he said, "and so there can be no music. We will proceed, however, to sing hymn number forty-eight."

He was conscious that a humorous interpretation might be made of his remarks; but it gave him no immediate concern. He had a far-away feeling, as if his body in this black coat stood here in the church close to the eye of the Rev. Mr. Lingley,

but his soul was somewhere else wandering off on an endless journey through the Catskills. To his mind came the lines of a poem—

The roads are copper ribbons for the feet,
And for the spirit unseen roads will run
As far as rise of moon or set of sun.

He opened the hymnal in his hand. "Number forty-eight," he repeated, but he never looked at the page. Something distracted him.

VII

A FIGURE had appeared in the doorway, a radiant, brilliant figure, and the next moment Consuelo came drifting down the aisle with swift, impeccable grace.

The book trembled in Mr. Huddle's hand. He saw Consuelo reach the Gothic archway, brush aside the red curtains, and take her seat on the organ bench.

Then her dark eyes flashed a message to him.

"We," he said in a voice that shook a little—"we will have music, after all."

The joy in his face must have been apparent to every one in the congregation,

although they may have attributed it to the spiritual exaltation he anticipated in the music. Not until the contribution was being taken up did he have a chance to step back of the curtains and speak with Consuelo alone.

"Why didn't you drive over for me?" she asked, as she went on playing the organ and sent the music echoing through the little church.

"I—I thought you'd never want to see me again."

"Silly!" she scolded him with a sudden softening in her eyes. "I never want to see anybody else."

And, since they were shut off from the congregation's view by the curtains, she lifted her lips for him to kiss.

In the glow of Mrs. Sandhammer's particular stained glass window that kiss had an exquisite and reverent significance for both of them. When Mr. Huddle went out to announce the last hymn to be sung, he changed the number.

"We will sing number three hundred and seven," he said.

The title of it was: "Have faith, and there will be miracles."

FROM A CASTLE TOWER

If after this
Sweet bitter span
Of dreams that shatter
And dreams that scatter
Stars and flowers
Through fragile hours,
There's nothing more—
If, after this,
Woman and man
Return to dust,
What does it matter?
All the castles
Of all the Spains
Crumble. They must.
Why should their vassals
Demand to be
Of more lasting core?
It would be bliss
To sleep as grains
On the same clean shore
Of eternity,
Washed by the same pure sea.

Richard Butler Glaenzer

Highfalutin'

THE BUNGALOW COLONY WAS A MAELSTROM OF MISUNDER-
STANDING, BUT THE SHIP'S OFFICER ASHORE
NEVER LOST HIS BEARINGS

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

"WE must simply look on it as a—
a lark!" said Mrs. De Haaven,
resolutely. But her voice was
not very steady, and her smile was some-
what strained, for in her heart she saw this,
not as a lark, but as something very close
to a tragedy.

"It's wonderfully light and airy," her
sister Rose began.

This was true; a fresh sea breeze went
blowing through the rooms, fluttering the
curtains and stirring the dark hair on Rose's
temples. The tiny house was sweet with
sun and salt wind. Both Mrs. De Haaven
and her sister could appreciate this, and
they were sternly determined to appreciate
every possible good point about their new
home.

But—it was so tiny, so bare, so terribly
strange; a sitting room, a bedroom, and a
kitchen, divided by partitions which did
not reach to the unstained rafters; painted
floors, badly scuffed, the queerest collection
of scarred, weather-beaten furniture.

"It will be like—camping out!" Mrs.
De Haaven decided.

The trouble was, that neither of them
had had any sort of experience in camping
out, and, what is more, had never desired
any such experience. They had led the
most casual, pleasant existence; when they
had wanted to be in the city, they had oc-
cupied Mrs. De Haaven's charming little
flat; when it occurred to them that they
would enjoy the country, they had gone out
to the old De Haaven farm on Long Island;
if the impulse seized them to travel, travel
they did, in a comfortable and leisurely
fashion.

Wherever they had been, in town or in
the country, in Paris, in Cairo, in Nice,

there always had been plenty of people
about to do all the disagreeable and diffi-
cult things for them, and to do them will-
ingly, because not only had the two ladies
paid well for all services rendered them, but
they were polite, kind and appreciative.

And now, with a jolt and a jar, that
smooth-moving existence had stopped.
Their lawyer, who had had complete charge
of their nice little fortune inherited from
their father, had either done something ter-
rible, or something terrible had happened to
him. They preferred, in charity, to believe
the latter, and anyhow, it did not matter.

The money had dwindled down to al-
most nothing, the flat was sublet, the farm
rented, and the poor ladies had taken this
beach bungalow on Staten Island for the
summer. They took it because it was
cheap, and because it was their tradition
that one had to leave the city in the sum-
mer, and because they hoped in this obscure
little place to be let alone, to get accus-
tomed to their new life in peace.

So here they were in their new home,
all paid for, all furnished, all ready for
them to begin living in. It was certainly
quiet enough, yet somehow it did not im-
press Mrs. De Haaven as being peaceful;
on the contrary, there was something alarm-
ing, almost terrible, in the quietness.

Nobody was doing anything or prepar-
ing anything for them; nothing would be
done until she and Rose did it; the house
simply stood there, waiting for them to
begin. How did one begin?

She was a little shocked with Rose for
turning her back on the house and sitting
down on the veranda railing.

"Oh, Rose!" she said. "Shouldn't we
set to work—get things in order?"

But Rose only reached out and caught her sister by the arm and pulled her down beside her.

"Look, darling!" she remarked. "That is *something*, isn't it?"

"That" was the sea before them—the North Atlantic, which rolled into the bay and broke upon the sands. They had looked upon the Pacific, upon the blue Mediterranean; they had seen many harbors, many beaches, beyond comparison lovelier than this flat shore.

But this, after all, was the great salt sea, the very source of life, and the sun made it glitter, and the wind blew off it, fresh and invigorating. It *was* something.

There they sat, with their arms about each other, such forlorn and lovely creatures! Nina De Haaven, dark and delicate; Rose taller, stronger, with a beautiful eagerness in her face, as if she waited in trust and delight for whatever her destiny might bring. She was twenty-four, and she had never really feared anything in her life.

Rose was not afraid, now, of this new existence, only a little puzzled, because she would have to be the one to start it. Nina was five years older, but she was too gentle, too easily rebuffed; she had never quite trusted life again after her beloved husband died.

"There's dinner," thought Rose. "I'm sure they don't supply food with furnished bungalows. I'll have to buy it and cook it. Mercy!"

She had to do it, though, and she would.

"Bread and butter," she also thought, "and eggs and milk, and tea and coffee, and sugar and spice. Everything goes in pairs! Coal and wood—"

Nina, less abstracted, started up.

"Somebody's knocking somewhere!" she said. "I believe it's our own back door. I'll go." And she vanished into the house. Rose followed promptly, and found her in the little kitchen, stooping over a basket on the table.

"It must be the dinner!" Nina declared, very much pleased. "There are all sorts of things here."

"How can it be the dinner?" Rose asked. She, too, bent over the basket and was enchanted by the varied assortment therein.

"Perhaps the tradespeople do that when some one new moves in," Mrs. De Haaven suggested. "As a sort of sample. A boy just left it without a word."

Rose shook her head.

"I don't think that's likely," she said. "I'm afraid it must be a mistake. But—" She was busy cataloguing these household things in her mind. Salt—she hadn't thought of that; and a box of bacon, and matches.

"I wish I'd kept house when Julian was alive," said Mrs. De Haaven, "and not lived in hotels. Then I shouldn't be so—useless."

Rose gave her a little shake.

"Encumberer of the earth!" she said, smilingly. "The thing is—whether I dare to pretend to be as artless as you really are."

"What do you mean, Rose?"

"I want to keep that basket!"

"Oh, Rose! When you think it's a mistake!"

"Yes!" said Rose, firmly. "I'll pay for it, of course, when I find out who it belongs to. But it's such a wonderful collection. I want it! Here's a package of pancake flour, and it tells you exactly how to make them. And the tin of coffee has directions on it, too. We could get on indefinitely, with pancakes and coffee."

"It would be terrible for our complexions," Nina objected.

"We can't afford complexions, any more," said Rose. And she began unpacking the basket, setting the tins and packages in neat rows on the dresser. The effect delighted them both; they were beginning to feel really at home now.

II

THE sun was going down behind the house, and the sea before them reflected in its darkening waters the faint purples and pinks streaking the sky. Mrs. De Haaven and her sister were on the veranda, facing the spectacle, but it aroused no enthusiasm in them; they were silent. They were tired, dejected and—hungry.

It was early in the season, and most of the bungalows were still unoccupied; there was not a soul in sight, not a human sound to be heard, nothing but the quiet breaking of the waves on the beach. A vast and inhospitable world.

"There comes some one!" said Mrs. De Haaven.

Round the corner of the shore two figures came into sight, a girl and a man. They came on very slowly, so close to each other that now and then their shoulders

touched. The strange sunset light touched their young heads with a sort of glory.

"We can ask her," Mrs. De Haaven began doubtfully.

"I suppose I'll have to," said Rose. "There's no one else alive on the surface of the earth. But — somehow I hate to bother them about oil stoves at such a moment. Still, I can't let her go!"

She sighed, and got up, but just then the couple turned and began walking up the sands directly toward them. They were so absorbed in each other, not talking very much, but looking at each other from time to time, long, long glances.

The man was a passably good-looking young fellow of a somewhat scholarly type, lean and tall, and wearing spectacles, but the girl was a marvel, a miracle of soft, rich colors and vigorous health. Her eyes were blue, her hair the shade of ripe wheat, her sunburned face beautifully flushed. She was strong, lithe, straight-limbed, and such a joy to see that Rose forgot all about oil stoves.

"Well, good-by, Margie!" said the young man in spectacles, in the most casual sort of tone.

"Good-by, Paul!" the girl rejoined, equally casual.

Their eyes met, and they both glanced hastily away. The girl essayed a smile.

"Well," she said. "Good-by, Paul!"

"Good-by, Margie!" he repeated. "I—"

There was a long silence.

"I'll have to go in," said she. "It's late. Good-by, Paul!"

She held out her hand, and he took it. They stood hand in hand, looking at each other. Suddenly she snatched away her hand.

"Good-by, Paul," she cried, and ran off.

"Good-by, Margie—dear!" he called after her.

She had gone into the bungalow next to them, slamming the screen door behind her.

"How—sweet!" Mrs. De Haaven declared. "How dear and *young*, Rose!"

"I'll give her a chance to get settled first, before I go and ask her," said Rose. "It's too sordid to ask her how to light a stove when she's just said good-by to Paul."

So they waited a little. Their neighbor was extraordinarily noisy in there; doors banged, all sorts of things rattled and slammed, and while they waited for this alarming racket to subside, a small open

car came down the road behind the houses, stopped, and presently the back door slammed and a voice sounded in there—a man's voice, and a young one, too.

"Look alive with that dinner, Margie! I'm in a hurry!"

"The things haven't come down from the store yet," said Margie. "I ordered them—"

"Don't make excuses," the man interrupted. "I told you I'd be home at six, and that I'd be in a hurry."

"Oh, I'm not making excuses!" answered Margie, scornfully. "I wouldn't bother to do that to you. I was just explaining. It's not my fault if the man doesn't bring the things."

"We've got *their* things!" Rose whispered to her sister. "I know it!"

"If you'd stay at home and look after your job, instead of running about with that measly little lawyer," the man began.

"Shut up!" cried Margie.

And somehow that furious exclamation hurt both the listeners. For both those quarreling voices, in spite of their bad temper and unrestraint, were good voices, the voices of people who ought to know better.

"All right!" said the man. "You wait till Bill comes home, young woman!"

"I don't give a darn about Bill!" she retorted. "If you're in such a hurry, take the car and go up to the store and get the stuff."

"Not much!" he said. "It's your job to get the meals, and I won't help you. I've got enough work of my own to do."

"I'll have to take them their things," murmured Rose, and she and her sister went into the kitchen and, by the feeble light of an ill-trimmed lamp, began to repack the basket in haste.

And while they were so engaged, there came the most tremendous slam of all, next door, and a new voice sounded, another man's voice, not loud and angry, like the others, but cool, deliberate, and masterful.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"No dinner ready," the other man replied petulantly.

"Because the things haven't come from the store," explained Margie, sullenly. "I ordered them in plenty of time."

"Take your car and go and get 'em, Gilbert," said the masterful voice.

"But, look here, Bill! I'm in a hurry—"

"Step!" said Bill.

And Gilbert was "stepping" out of the

back door just as Rose was coming in with the basket. He backed into the kitchen again, and she followed him.

"I think these are yours," she said. "They were left at our house—by mistake, I'm sure."

Some one took the basket from her, and looking up, she had her first sight of Bill.

He was, she thought, the most impressive human being she had ever set eyes on, and one of the handsomest. A tremendous fellow, blue-eyed and fair-haired, like Margie, but without a trace of her sullenness; there was a sort of grim good-humor in his face.

He was not smiling, though; none of them were, and Rose was seized with a sudden uneasiness in the presence of these three silent, blue-eyed creatures. With a deprecating smile, she opened the back door, to flee—when she remembered Nina.

"I—I wish—" she said, addressing Margie. "After you've quite finished here, of course. If you could just spare a moment to show me how to light that oil stove."

"I'll show you now," said Bill. He followed her out the door, and his fingers closed like steel on her arm as he helped her down the steps in the dark and across the little strip of grass behind the houses. He did not release her until she was safely in her own bare, dimly-lit kitchen.

"Good evening!" he remarked to Nina, and swept off his white-covered uniform cap with a magnificent gesture. Then, without words, he dropped on one knee beside the stove, and he turned up the wick and struck a match, just as Rose had done.

"No oil in it," he announced, rising. "I'll get you some."

"Mercy!" said Nina, after he had gone. "What a-an overwhelming creature!"

"Isn't he?" Rose agreed. "He made me forget that, even if the stove ever does get lighted, there's nothing to cook on it. I'll have to ask him where the store is."

"It's dark now, Rose. You can't go wandering about in this strange place."

"There's nothing I wouldn't do now for the sake of food!" said Rose.

There was a knock at the back door; they both called "Come in!" and Bill re-entered, letting the screen door crash behind him. He was carrying a tin of kerosene, and at once he set to work filling the stove.

"I'm very sorry to put you to all this trouble!" Nina asserted, earnestly.

He didn't answer at all; he lit all the burners, and then:

"What next?" he asked.

"If you'll please tell me where the store is—the store that basket came from—and how to get there—"

"Now? It's closed," said he. His keen glance traveled round the bare little kitchen.

"I'll see that you get your dinner," he declared, and went off again, before they could say a word.

It was Gilbert who brought the dinner in on a tray, and no one could have performed a neighborly service more ungraciously. He was a remarkably good-looking boy of nineteen or so, but so surly, ill-tempered—

"He's a young beast!" said Rose, indignantly.

Nina was silent a moment.

"Isn't it queer—" she remarked. "How contagious that is!"

"Beastliness? *You'd* never catch it!" Rose declared.

"My dear, when he banged that tray down, and never even took off his hat, I wanted to throw a plate at him," said Nina, seriously. "I'd have enjoyed it!"

It was a good dinner, served on the coarsest of china, but well cooked. And after they had eaten it and washed the dishes, they were ready to go to bed and to sleep, not quite so forlorn in their new home.

III

THEY were awakened the next morning by a persistent and none too gentle knocking at the back door, and Nina, slipping on a dressing gown, hurried to respond. She opened the door upon a riotous, glittering June morning, and Margie, clear-eyed and glowing as the dawn—but far from amiable.

"Here's your breakfast!" she said, thrusting a wooden box into Nina's hands.

"Oh, but how awfully good and kind!" cried Nina. "I never—"

"Bill said you didn't have a thing in the house," Margie remarked, scornfully, "and couldn't even light the stove. So he told me to bring this."

Her brusque contempt was a little too much even for the gentle Nina.

"It's very kind of you," she said, with a polite smile. "But we'd have managed somehow—"

Margie shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, Bill told me to bring your breakfast," she said. "And to ask what you wanted from the store."

"Thank you, but I couldn't think—" Nina began, but with another disdainful shrug Margie had turned away.

"We'll have to swallow our pride," Rose suggested from the doorway. "Let's be quick, too, before it gets cold."

"I'm going to dress first," said Nina. "Because when that scornful Margie goes out, I'm going to follow. I'll follow her all day long till she goes to the store."

And she meant that. She dressed herself with all her usual unobtrusive art, and she kept an eye on the house next door. In the very act of lifting her second cup of coffee to her lips, she heard the front door slam. She sprang up, pulled on a delightful little hat, and ran out of her own front door.

Margie was walking quickly up the road, a strong, lithe young figure in a jersey and a short skirt, bareheaded in the sun. And after her went the slender and elegant Mrs. De Haaven, going to market for the first time in her life.

In a happy mood Rose set to work; she washed the dishes, made the bed, set the little place in order, and then began unpacking the two big trunks. Most of the clothes could stay in them, but there were all sorts of other things—silver toilet articles, photographs, books, writing materials, all the dear, friendly things that had often made even hotel rooms look home-like. They worked wonders here. The only trouble was, that there was no shelf for the books, and no flowers.

"I'll make a shelf!" Rose told herself.

So she went out on the beach and found a suitable small board; then she screwed two coat hooks into the wall beneath the sitting room window, laid the board across them, and stood the favorite books on this in a row.

"Crude, but well-meaning!" she observed, surveying her first piece of carpentering with a smile, and she went out to see if there were any flowers about to delight Nina with when she came home.

The first thing she saw was Bill coming down the road. Her impulse was to step back into the house, but she was ashamed of such weakness; Bill ought to be spoken to and thanked. So she sat down on the steps, and Bill, catching sight of her, swung off his hat with that same fine gesture.

"*Comment ça va?*" he inquired, standing bareheaded before her.

Certainly she had not expected French from Bill, but she politely suppressed her surprise and answered cheerfully:

"*Tres bien, merci, monsieur!* I was just wondering if there were any wild flowers growing about here?"

She looked up at him, but hastily glanced aside, for Bill was looking down at her with a smile which disconcerted her.

"Flowers, eh?" he said.

They were both silent for a time. Then Rose began, in a somewhat formal tone:

"My sister and I are both very grateful for—"

A crash interrupted her.

"What's that?" asked Bill.

"It sounds like my shelf," she replied, ruefully.

"Did you try to put up a shelf?" Bill demanded. "Let's have a look at it."

Somehow she did not want Bill to come into their house. Not that she distrusted or disliked him, but he made her uneasy. Still, she could not very well refuse to let him come, so, with a good grace, she opened the door and they entered.

His blond head almost reached the ceiling; his great shoulders blocked all the sunshine from the window; he seemed completely to fill the little room. And she did not like him to be there.

The pretty little things she had set out on the table seemed like a child's toys, the house was like a doll's house, and she herself, with her ineffectual shelf, felt altogether too diminished. He had been staring at the fallen shelf and the coat hooks for some time with an odd expression—as if he felt sorry for her.

"Look here!" he said. "When you want anything of that sort done, tell me."

"There's no reason on earth why I should trouble you, Mr.—"

"Morgan," said he. "It wouldn't be a trouble. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you. Nothing!"

The earnestness with which he spoke confused her.

"Thank you, Mr. Morgan," she began, hastily. "But—"

"Look here!" he interrupted. "I've got to go away—and I don't like to leave you like this. You can't look after yourself any better than a baby."

Rose turned scarlet.

"You're mistaken, Mr. Morgan!" she

declared, with a cold little smile. "You're very much mistaken!"

"No," he said. "No, I'm not. I knew, the first moment I saw you—"

"We won't discuss the matter, if you please."

"I'm not discussing anything," said he, with a sort of gentleness. "I'm only telling you that you've got me to count on whenever you need me."

Her hands clenched, but she answered quietly enough:

"I can't imagine any possibility of 'needing' you, Mr. Morgan."

He turned toward the door.

"I don't mean to make a nuisance of myself," he declared, gravely. And then he smiled. "I'm going away," he added.

"But I'm coming back!"

The screen door banged after him, and Rose sat down on the couch and began to cry.

"Beast!" she cried. "I'd like to shake him!"

But the idea of her shaking Mr. Morgan made her laugh. She dried her tears, ashamed of her temper, and when Nina got back, she was her usual good-natured, delightful self again. She did not mention the episode to Nina; it would only distress her.

"And I think I'm capable of managing Mr. Morgan!" she told herself, grimly.

IV

NINA was surprised by her sister's censorious attitude.

"But they do try to be neighborly!" she protested.

"I don't care!" said Rose, with unwonted heat. "I don't like them, and I don't want anything to do with them. They're a family of—savages!"

"Oh, Rose! When that poor little Margie brings us flowers from her own garden every day!"

"Yes, because that Bill told her to!" thought Rose. But aloud she said: "Brings them! She pretty nearly throws them at us."

"That's just her way."

"Well, I don't like her way, and I don't want her flowers, and I don't like any of those Morgans, or anything they do. I never imagined such an ill-tempered, quarrelsome family."

"I know," said Nina, seriously. "And I think it's pitiful."

"Pitiful! To snarl and snap at one another—"

"Yes," said Nina. "Because there's something so splendid about them, in spite of all that—something so honest and fine."

"Fine!" cried Rose, with a snort.

"You must have noticed. They're rough and unmannerly, but they're never vulgar. And they speak well. I think they've come down in the world, Rose."

"They certainly have!" Rose agreed. "Down to the bottom. Nina, you're sentimental about your Morgans. You've seen how they live. A coarse, ugly life, without one gracious touch. They eat in the kitchen, on a table covered with oilcloth."

"Yes, and it's a spotless kitchen, and everything about them is wholesome."

"It's no use," Rose objected. "I don't like them, and I won't like them. Now, you sit here on the veranda and read. I'm going to buy the Sunday dinner."

"I'll come with you," said Nina, but she was glad Rose would not let her. It was a long walk, and she felt tired, very tired and languid. She did not want Rose to know how tired she was, or how worried.

It seemed that their financial affairs were not definitely settled, as they had believed. Mr. Doyle, the lawyer, kept writing to her letters she could not quite understand, anxious, almost desperate letters, accusing himself of "criminal folly"; begging her forgiveness, and making all sorts of promises. He wrote always to her, never to Rose, and she was glad of that, for she did not want Rose to know.

But she was so tired. She tried valiantly to do her share, to be a good comrade to her beloved sister; but she was not strong, either in body or in spirit; she was a gentle soul; she could endure, but she could not fight. She wanted only to live in peace and good will, harmless and lovely as a flower.

It was a Saturday afternoon; Gilbert had come home early in his little car, and he and Margie had at once begun to quarrel fiercely.

"Bill told you to take me to the village in the car, if I wanted!" she declared.

"Do you good to walk!" said her brother.

"I won't walk!"

"All right! Then stay home!"

Presently the back door slammed, in the Morgan fashion, and Nina hoped he was going away. It hurt her to hear these two

young creatures quarrel so; she always wished that she had some magic word to stop them, to bring quiet to their stormy spirits. She was waiting for the sound of his engine starting up, when, to her surprise, she saw him standing on the path before her.

"Mrs. De Haaven," he said, "can you spare me a few minutes?"

"With pleasure!" she answered, as if this amazing request were quite a matter of course. "Come up on the veranda, won't you?"

He did come up, and when she asked him, sat down opposite her. He was silent for a few moments, and Nina studied him with frank and kindly curiosity. For the first time she saw what a remarkably handsome boy he was, a little haggard, a little too thin, perhaps, but tall and sinewy, and notably distinguished.

Yes, that was the word; he was distinguished looking, with his thin, rather arrogant face, his slender, well-kept hands, his neat dark suit. He was not surly to-day, and not shy or awkward; he looked at her candidly as he spoke.

"I hope you won't mind," he said. "But I knew *you* could tell me. If you'd give me your advice. I've got an invitation—but perhaps I'd better show it to you."

He took a letter out of his pocket and handed it to her. It read:

MY DEAR BOY:

Why not run down for this week-end? Don't bother to let me know—just come if you can. I often think of you, and it seems to me perfectly terrible that you should be living like that. And quite unnecessary. I want you to meet some of your own sort.

Yours—most sincerely,

LUCILLE WINTER.

Lucille Winter! And writing in this vein to this boy! Nina held the letter in her hand for a long time, unable to say anything to cloak her thought.

"You see," said Gilbert, "I couldn't go until to-day, on account of my job. And I'd have to come back to-morrow night. D'you think that would be all right?"

"No!" thought Nina. "Nothing could be less right. It's—a horrible thing. You're only a child. And Lucille— You don't know Lucille, but I do."

"You see," he went on. "Mrs. Winter is my father's cousin. You wouldn't suspect it, but my father's family were—decent people."

"Oh!" Nina breathed.

"I don't mean that mother's family wasn't—all right," he said. "My mother—" He stopped. "My mother was a saint," he announced. An odd change came over his face; all the arrogance vanished, leaving it weary and sorrowful. "And my father wasn't," he added.

Another silence ensued.

"So Bill's got this idea of a simple life," he said, with something like a sneer. "He won't let us see any of father's people. Wouldn't let me go to college. He made me take this job—in the National Electric—when I was only seventeen. In a year I'll be twenty-one, and then Bill can go to blazes. In the meantime—not much I can do. He controls the finances. He's away now, though. And I'm going to Mrs. Winter's."

"Oh, I don't blame you!" thought Nina. "What a dreadful thing—to take a boy like this and put him to work at seventeen, and make him live in such a way! And if Lucille is his father's cousin— She knows really good people— It really would help him—"

And because she was, in spite of her worldly experiences, so innocent and good at heart, so ready to think well of every one, and so anxious to help this unhappy boy, she did give him her advice. She told him what clothes to take, what to tip the servants, and so on.

"Please don't tell Margie where I've gone," he said. "I'll be back to-morrow night for dinner. And she'll be all right—with you next door." He arose. "Thank you!" he said. "You've been—very kind to me."

She had meant to be. She hoped, she believed, that she had done well in helping him to elude the tyrant Bill.

V

SUCH a quiet afternoon. Rose turned off the highway, into the beach road; the bright sea lay before her, roughened by a frolic wind, and on its edge three or four little children played; their voices came to her joyous and clear. Their end of the beach had been described by the real estate agent as "the quiet end," and so it was; their bungalow and the Morgans' were the only ones occupied as yet, and even these two showed no signs of life to-day.

Rose entered the house. It was certain-

ly not a good house to hide in, and she very soon discovered Nina in the bedroom with her hat on!

"I had a telegram from Mr. Doyle," she explained, hurriedly. "He wants to see me about—something. So I thought to-day would be a good time to run into town."

"That won't do!" said Rose, severely. "You can't treat me this way, Mrs. De Haaven! I want to know all about it."

Nina turned and put both hands on her sister's shoulders, looking steadily into her face.

"Rose!" she said. "Let me do this—my own way—alone. I've been such a useless creature. No! Please, darling, let me finish! I have been useless. I know you don't mind, but—sometimes—Rose! I do so want to manage this all by myself. And I know I can!"

They were both silent for a moment.

"All right! Go ahead, darling!" Rose agreed at last. "Only don't come back to-night. Stay in a hotel and come back to-morrow morning."

"And leave you all alone?"

"The Morgans are here, and they're enough. If you don't promise not to come back to-night, I'll—I'll go with you!"

So Nina consented, although reluctantly, and a few minutes later they set off together for the railway station. Rose stood on the platform, looking after the train.

"God bless you, darling!" she said, softly to herself.

Poor valiant, gentle Nina, going off to attend to business affairs, to "manage" the elusive and plausible Mr. Doyle.

"But it would have hurt her if I'd said anything," thought Rose. "And, anyhow, things couldn't be much worse, financially."

She walked back to the bungalow, a long walk; but she was in no hurry to reënter the empty house. It was ridiculous to miss Nina so, just for one night; it was weak and sentimental to feel so lonely.

"I might learn a lesson from the Morgans," she thought, as she went down the beach road. "No one could accuse them of being too sentimental in their family life!"

And suddenly she felt sorry for the Morgans, with their quarrels and their banging doors and their stormy, miserable existence. She thought of them, and she thought of the love between Nina and herself which made any place home, any trial endurable. And she pitied them with all her heart.

There was Margie on the veranda now, sewing—sewing in such a Morgan way! She had a paper pattern spread out on the table, and the wind fluttered it, and Margie pounced down upon it furiously, upsetting her workbasket and getting herself tangled up in the yards and yards of green charmeuse on her lap. Rose watched her for a minute; then she said, moved by a friendly impulse:

"Miss Morgan, won't you let me help you?"

Margie spun round, upsetting everything again.

"No, thanks!" she replied, in her scornful way. But something in Rose's face made her flush and glance away. "Well," she said, sullenly, "I *am* having a pretty bad time. There's no reason why you should bother, but—"

Rose came up on the veranda beside her, and surveyed the woeful muddle.

"What a pretty shade!" she remarked. "It ought to go well with your hair."

"I know," said Margie. "Paul—I mean—I've been told I ought to wear green. And I'm going somewhere to-morrow afternoon."

"But you don't expect to have this dress ready for to-morrow afternoon."

"I've got to."

Rose reflected for a moment.

"I'll tell you what!" she announced at last. "I have a green dress—a really pretty georgette. I've only worn it once. With just a little bit of altering, we could make it do beautifully for you to wear to-morrow. It's a good model. I got it in Paris last autumn. Won't you come and look at it?"

"No!" cried Margie. "I don't want any of your old clothes. I don't want—" Her voice broke. "I just hate you and your—highfalutin' ways!" she ended with a sob.

"Upon my word!" Rose began, indignantly. "Is that—" But her resentment could not endure against the sight of Margie weeping in that furious, defiant way, the tears falling recklessly on the green charmeuse.

"You don't really hate me, Margie," she said. "You couldn't—when I like you so much."

"Like me?"

"I liked you the very first time I saw you," Rose explained. "You were saying good-by to Paul, on the beach."

"You saw Paul?" cried Margie. "I suppose you'll tell Bill. Well, I don't care! If you don't tell Bill, Gilbert will."

Rose found it surprisingly easy not to get angry with Margie.

"But why should your brother object to Paul?" she inquired.

"It's not that," said Margie. "Only what do you suppose Paul would think of Bill—and this house—and the way we live? Oh, I'm so ashamed of us! I'm so—so ashamed of us! If you knew—when mother was alive—three years ago—we had our dear home, and everything so dainty and pretty in it—and she kept us from fighting—just by being there. Oh, mother! Mother darling! You don't know—nobody knows—what it's like—without her."

Rose knelt down beside the girl, put an arm about her, and drew the bright head down on her shoulder.

"You poor little thing!" she crooned. "Poor little Margie!"

"And now—I'm going to lose Paul," Margie went on, in a choked voice. "He's always asking why he can't come to see me in my own home. He's awfully particular and high minded. He hates to meet me on the sly that way. And—"

"I'd let him come, if I were you."

"I won't! I'm too much ashamed of us."

"Couldn't you make things a little better?" Rose suggested, very gently.

"Bill won't let me! Bill's a beast! When mother died, he gave up our dear old house—he's packed up all her pretty things—they're in the woodshed, in barrels and boxes. He won't let me touch them. He says we've got to learn to work and to live simply. He just adored mother, and he thought father didn't make her happy enough, so he's got this idiotic idea about our not being like father's people—not being highfalutin'. 'Plain living and high thinking,' that's what he's always saying. High thinking, when he hasn't left one beautiful thing in our lives! It's all very well for him; he's away at sea most of the time—"

"At sea?"

"Yes; he's first mate on a cargo steamer," said Margie, with a change in her voice. "I know he's a beast, and all that, but there is something fine about Bill, after all. He's a real man. And he's been awfully good to us—in his way. When Gilbert had bronchitis last winter, Bill was—

wonderful. And when mother died—I—I don't know how I could have lived without Bill."

She was silent for a moment. "Mother said she knew Bill would take care of us—and he does—only it's in a wrong way. Bill's so—I don't know how to describe it—Bill's so—big, he could live on a desert island and not be discontented. He can live in this rough, common way and still be—dignified. I don't suppose you've ever noticed, but Bill has a way of coming into a room sometimes and taking off his hat, that's like—like a king."

Rose felt her cheeks grow scarlet.

"He *is*—impressive," she agreed.

"Bill's big," Margie went on, "and he only wants a few big things. But Gilbert and I are little, and we want lots of little things. And—" She sat up straight.

"Paul wants to take me to see his sister to-morrow afternoon," she said, "and I'm going! There'll be a row—because Gilbert said he'd have to have his dinner at six, and he's not going to get it. I'm not even going to try to get home by six. He can tell Bill about Paul if he wants. I don't care. It's got to happen some day."

"Margie, I'll get Gilbert's dinner for him to-morrow."

"You?" said Margie.

"I'd like to. And you can enjoy your afternoon with an easy mind. I'll get Gilbert's supper, and—Margie—bring Paul back with you, and I'll have something nice ready for you both."

VI

Rose had left a lamp burning in her own sitting room, as a beacon for Nina, and all the time she was busy in the Morgan's kitchen, she was listening for that footstep. And for all her pleasure and excitement in this surprise she had prepared for the Morgans, a vague anxiety lay in the back of her mind, because Nina was so long in coming. She had expected her for lunch, and the whole afternoon had gone by without her.

She wished Nina could have seen Margie set out, in that Paris dress—the loveliest, happiest creature! And she wished Nina were here now, to lend her moral support in this wildly audacious plan, for, now that the thing was done, she felt a little frightened. Margie and Gilbert were little more than children; she could manage them; she could really help them.

But it seemed to her that the shadow of Bill lay over the house; he himself might be hundreds of miles away, but she couldn't forget that this was his house, and that she was defying him. The thought caused her an odd sort of pain; you might dislike Bill, she thought, and vigorously resent his domineering ways, but it was impossible not to respect him.

It was even impossible not to like him just a little when you thought how honestly he tried to take care of his unruly household, and when you remembered all those little kindnesses. Well, the sensible thing was, not to remember.

She had a natural talent for cooking, and with the aid of a cookbook, she had managed an excellent dinner. That part of the plan caused her no worry. But the rest—She opened the oven door for one more look at the pair of chickens sizzling richly in there, and then with a sigh, went again to the dining room door.

An amazing change was there! The round table was covered with a fine damask cloth, and set out with gay, old-fashioned china, frail glassware, sturdy old plate, all gleaming in the light of the shaded lamp. On the walls hung two or three framed pictures, not masterpieces by any means, but somehow lovable and friendly.

"She'd like me to do this," thought Rose. "For her children."

Because, as she had unpacked these things from the boxes and barrels, such a strange feeling had come over her; she had felt that she understood that mother. Standing here now, surrounded by the perishable and infinitely touching belongings of that beloved woman, dead, but so tenderly remembered by all her children, she thought she knew how she had felt toward them all, how she had managed each one of them, wisely and patiently; how she had loved them for the qualities which were so splendid in them, and the faults that were only pitiful. And she wanted them to remember their mother, not in bitterness and grief, but happily, as if always conscious of her dear spirit.

A sound startled her; a noise like little feet running over the tarred paper on the roof. At first she thought, with no great comfort, that it was rats, but then the pattering came upon the windowpanes, against the door. It was rain.

"Nina!" she thought. "What can be keeping her so late!"

She went into the kitchen and opened the back door; the summer rain was driving down with steady violence, drumming loud on the roof now, spattering up from the path. Such a dark, strange world for Nina to be out in alone! Moved by a sudden impulse, she ran out into the rain and entered their own house; the lamp still burned clear and steady in the neat little room. The clock struck six.

"Oh, Nina!" she cried, aloud, in an unreasoning panic of fear. "Nina, darling!"

And then, above all the noise of the rain, she heard a familiar sound, the slam of a door by which all the Morgans announced their home coming. She hurried back there, her courage, her generous hopes, all gone now.

"I'm an officious busybody!" she thought. "Why didn't I stay at home and mind my own affairs? Oh, I wish I'd let the Morgans alone! I wish—"

She stopped short in the kitchen doorway, staring at Gilbert. He was wearing a dinner jacket, and it was soaked through with rain; his collar was wilted, his tie askew, his fair hair plastered across his forehead, his blue eyes very brilliant. And his face, his clear-featured, handsome young face, so white, so strained, so lamentably changed! The momentary disgust she had felt turned to a painful compassion.

"Gilbert!" she said, in a pleasant, matter-of-fact voice. "Get on dry clothes. Your dinner's ready for you."

She spoke to him as she thought his mother might have spoken; she thought she felt a little as his mother might have felt to see the boy like this.

"No!" he said, in an unsteady voice. "Let me alone! What are you doing here?"

"I'm so glad I am here!" she thought. "So glad! Poor little Margie! If she brings her Paul here now—" And aloud: "Gilbert!" she said, with quiet authority. "Please do as I ask you—at once. Change your clothes."

"I won't!" he said. "No, I won't! You don't know. You can't understand. Only Bill. Bill knew. Bill was right. I wish I was dead!"

The same childish passion and unreason that Margie had shown. He sank into a chair by the table and buried his face in his hands.

"I wish I was dead!" he said again.

And Rose, always listening for Nina's

step, had also to listen to this boy's sorry little tale. He had gone to visit his father's cousin, Lucille Winter.

"Bill told me they were no good," he said, "but I wouldn't believe him. And—you don't know what it was like. I lost over a hundred dollars at bridge. And I drank. I didn't mean to, but every one else did, and I've come home to my sister like this. If I'd had a penny left, I'd never have come home again—never! It's—you don't know—it's all so beastly, and I thought I'd like that sort of life, but—I couldn't get out fast enough. I've found out now that old Bill was right—but it's too late."

"It is not!" Rose declared, firmly.

"I can't pay that hundred," he said. "And I've got to pay it to-morrow. I—you can't understand."

"And if you weren't so honest and sound at heart you couldn't feel so sorry!" thought Rose. But she did not intend to give him too much consolation; his shame and remorse were of inestimable value to him. "If you'll wash and change your wet clothes, and eat your nice hot dinner, you'll feel better," she insisted.

"I'll—I'll never feel better!" said he.

"I'll give you a cup of coffee now," she began, when that sound, welcome beyond all others, reached her ears—Nina's step on the veranda.

"Wait, Gilbert!" she cried, and ran back into her own house. Nina was standing in the front room, drawing off her gloves.

"Rose," she said, in a strange, flat voice. "It's all gone—every cent!"

Rose helped her off with her wet jacket, took off her hat, pushed her gently into a chair, and kneeling, began to unfasten her shoes, such absurd little shoes, and soaked through.

"Never mind, Nina!" she said. "We're together, and that's all that matters."

Nina's hands and feet were cold as ice, and her cheeks flushed.

"Even the check we gave for this rent was no good," she explained. "The house belongs to Mr. Morgan, and I suppose he didn't like to tell us. I tried to borrow—just a little—this afternoon—from friends—I thought they were friends—"

"Hush, darling! Who cares? You'll get straight into bed, with a hot-water bottle at your poor cold feet, and I'll make you a cup of beautiful coffee."

She stopped short.

Margie, bringing back Paul, to find Gilbert like that. And she had told Margie to bring him. It was all her fault.

She looked at the clock; half past six. Margie was to be expected any minute now. Gilbert was sitting there in the kitchen in his wet clothes. He didn't look very strong.

And Nina! Nina was telling her about Mr. Doyle, and she pretended to pay attention, but she was listening for Margie's home-coming now with as much anxiety as she had listened for Nina's. This might spoil Margie's poor little romance forever—and it was *her* fault. Gilbert would be ill.

She had just got Nina into bed when the screen door slammed in the next house.

"One instant, Nina!" she cried, and rushed out, down the steps, through the sodden little garden in the driving rain, and back into the Morgans' kitchen. Gilbert still sat just as she had left him, his head on his arm.

"I'll—lock him in!" she thought, desperately. "But I'll have to tell Margie."

She went into the little passage, closing the kitchen door behind her, and on into the sitting room. No one there. So she went toward the dining room. The doorway was blocked by a tremendous figure, standing there hat in hand, his back toward her.

"Oh, *Bill!*" she cried, in her immeasurable relief.

He turned; he saw her there, with her soft hair wet and disordered, her face so white; he had seen his dining table set out with his mother's sacred possessions—and he showed no surprise. She thought that nothing would surprise him, nothing would shock him, that he would meet anything in his life coolly, honestly, and steadily—like a man.

"Gilbert's been to a week-end party at Lucille Winter's," she said. "He's—he's in the kitchen. You've got to be very careful with him. He's only a child."

"All right!" Bill agreed, with the shadow of a smile. "I'll take Gilbert back into the fold. But this—" His smile vanished as he glanced toward the dining room again. "This—"

"I'm sorry," said Rose. "But—poor little Margie's bringing Paul—a friend of hers, home to dinner to-night, and—" She paused a moment, then she looked resolutely up at Bill. "I thought she would like it," she went on. "For her children—so that they'd remember—the things they've

forgotten. I'm sorry, but—" A sob choked her.

"Please," she begged, "be very kind to Margie—and Gilbert—and Paul. I've got to go. I meant to stay, but—my Nina's sick."

She turned to go, but tears blinded her; she stumbled against the lintel. Bill's hand touched her arm, the lightest touch, to guide her.

"I promise you," he said, "that everything shall be just as you want it."

She brushed her hand across her eyes

and looked at him. And she thought she had never in her life seen anything like that look on his face.

"I want to help you," he announced. "That's what I've always wanted, since the first moment I saw you."

Neither of them had another word to say, to spoil that moment. She ran back again to Nina, through the rain, and she thought she must sing, for joy and relief.

Everything was all right now, for Bill had come. She was so happy—so happy—just because Bill had come.

Hell or High Water

THESE FISHER FOLK OF OUR NORTHWESTERN COAST MAKE
BETROTHAL VOWS WHOSE WORDS ARE AS IF
ACID-ETCHED IN COPPER

By Herman Howard Matteson

HOD BURROWS, usually as faithful to duty as a dog, had actually allowed himself to fall asleep. Before he was aware, the droning swish of the tide, purling between the throbbing pilings of the fish trap, had lulled him into slumber.

The incautious thud of something bumping into the corner of the spiller aroused him. The night watch on a salmon trap is really supposed to watch.

He had awakened with a start, and for his dereliction to duty gave himself a punitive whack alongside the head with an immense fist. Then, with a catfoot tread, he ran to the edge of the watch deck and peered down into the spiller.

The trap was being looted. A fish pirate had slashed a rent in the webbing of the spiller, and had poked the prow of a dory into the confined space that teemed with forty-pound Tyee salmon, and the lesser humpbacks and silvers.

As boldly as if there were no six-foot, two-hundred-pound watchman anywhere on Puget Sound, the pirate was swiftly filling his dory with salmon that would fetch four bits to three dollars each at any cannery in the Northwest.

Crouched in the darkness on the edge of the spiller, Hod observed with admiration the excellent technique of the fellow. He had provided himself with a board, six feet long, painted a shining white. The thief held this wooden reflector thrust down into the black water.

When a swimming salmon showed itself against the whiteness of the board, the pirate made a kingfisher dart with a gaff hook. A deft twist, a flirt, and a salmon thudded down into the dory, where it added its frantic flapping to the churning mass.

Hod flattened himself upon the coping of the spiller, and watched while Tyee after Tyee amplified the agitated heap in the dory's stern. It was his purpose to permit the pirate to fill his dory—a full cargo is the more convincing evidence—then reach down a long arm, haul the chap to the deck, and make him prisoner.

Thud! Splash! Flap! Flop! Higher grew the wriggling pile in the dory.

"Must be near a cargo," communed Hod to himself, leaning ever so slightly out into the open of the spiller. "Near a cargo by now. Guess I'd better go into action."

Still farther out into space he leaned.

He shot down a long arm. His great grab hook of a hand pinched itself into a shoulder. With a tremendous heave, Hod lifted the fellow out of his dory, and dragged him to the surface of the watch deck.

But the pirate twisted away, and something metallic glinted in the starlight. Hod, the next instant, saw yet other stars as a heavy automatic pistol whacked against the side of his head.

The fish thief went dodging and leaping across the deck. Hod, his vision a trifle blurred, still gained a fairly clear silhouette of the fellow against the skyline as he scrambled over the planks.

The pirate, his back humped grotesquely, long arms dangling like rope ends, was an appalling, shadowy presence. He moved with a sort of clawing motion, sidewise, like a land crab. The figure with the humped back and jumping-jack arms and legs was more that of some misshapen, fantastic gnome than of a man.

Reaching the seaward side of the spiller, the thief flounced down upon the planks, and tried with his splay feet and bandy legs to locate the rungs of the side ladder.

Hod sprang after him, and again dragged him to his feet. Again, viciously, the marauder struck with the automatic. Hod swept aside the blow and flirted the gun from the fellow's grasp, and it plunked into the waters of the spiller.

Then Hod bored his fingers into the man's shoulder and held him rather easily while he fished a flash light from the pocket of his tarpaulin coat, and shot its blinding white rays into the pirate's face.

At sight of the fish thief's scowling countenance, hideously hateful and malevolent, Hod let go and fell back with a startled cry. The pirate hitched himself after the watchman, and struck again.

II

WHEN Hod recovered consciousness he found himself snubbed up with his back against a piling of the fish trap, made fast in this ignominious posture with turn upon turn of rope that the fellow had cut from one of the haul downs. One arm was free from the elbow down.

Hod contrived to lift the hand of this arm and located four distinct, painful bumps upon his temple. The pirate had laid him out with brass knuckles.

It was getting daylight. The trap crew were coming on from shore, their hob-

nailed boots rasping the plank that ran along the top of the lead. Old Man Marston discovered Hod in his plight, and let a yell out of him that fetched the others on the run.

Billy Mitchell, owner of the trap, stood eyeing Hod suspiciously. The ropes that bound Hod were a bit slack, the knots tied unskillfully.

Mitchell walked to the edge of the trap, discovered the gash in the webbing, and surveyed the placid waters of the spiller in which swam not a single salmon. What fish the pirate had left had swum to liberty through the rent. Mitchell walked back and glowered down at his watchman.

"On the dead level, Hod," he demanded with ungentele sarcasm, "how much did the pirate give you?"

Mitchell lifted a loose strand of the rope, gave it a yank, and slipped a loop over the top of the piling.

"You think I sold you out, Billy; let a man pirate you? That what you think?"

"What can a man think? You, a husky, gun in your pocket, tangled in a make-believe tie-up that a sick Siwash could climb out of! What can a man think?"

Hod got to his feet as the remaining rope was cast off, and passed his hand over the bumps conferred by the brass knuckles.

"When you get your breakfast in the chuck shack, Hod," said Mitchell, "come on back to the trap and get your time. You're fired!"

Hod stood teetering from foot to foot, looking a bit foolish, while Old Man Marston, with a pike pole, was making certain that the tunnels were open. Other men of the crew were getting ready to repair the slit cut in the spiller by the fish pirate.

A salmon trap of Puget Sound or Alaska consists of a row of pilings driven from the shore across the direction of the tide, and called the lead. Wire netting is fastened to the lead, reaching from the bottom to a point above high tide mark.

The lead ends in the pot, a square of pilings covered also with wire net. From the pot, a webbing tunnel leads into the heart, another square of wire covered pilings, and a second tunnel opens into the spiller, which is an inverted sack of webbing held bottom down by ropes called the haul downs.

The swimming salmon, encountering the lead, turn from shore, enter the pot, swim on foolishly through the tunnel into the

heart, and thence into the spiller. The intricacies of a trap are too much for the brain of a salmon, and he remains in the spiller until the trap is lifted.

When it is desired to empty a trap, the bottom of the spiller is lifted by means of ropes. The squirming mass of fish, numbering thousands if the run is good, are hoisted out half a ton at a time by means of a power brail, a stout, sagging square of webbing on a frame that is hoisted by means of gear operated by a gas engine. The brail is swung out over the edge of the spiller and emptied into a waiting scow.

III

Hod started a half dozen times to go ashore, and as often came to a pause. An excuse to remain longer on the trap presented itself in the form of a gray speed boat that appeared to be heading toward the trap. It soon came up alongside the ladder, and a thin-lipped, determined-looking, middle-aged man mounted the rungs.

"Just got word from our lookout in Anacortes," said the stranger, addressing Billy Mitchell, "that a dory load of pirate fish was sold after midnight. They were mostly Tyees. It was suggested that they might have come from this trap. I see they did."

The man pointed to the slit in the spiller.

"There's a bad one loose in Puget Sound now, a cripple called Ase Lewis," he continued. "He just came from Alaska, where he's been operating pretty strong for three or four years. The Alaska packers offer five thousand dollars' reward for him, dead or alive. We're deputy marshals, so we are not in on the reward. Nice pick-up for some of you boys. Anyway, we'll get him, if he sticks here in the San Juan Islands."

Hod Burrows stood meditatively rubbing the four brass knuckle bumps upon his temple.

At that juncture Old Man Marston, engaged in hauling up the empty spiller, sang out shrilly: "Look, Bill."

The old fellow tossed Mitchell a dripping wet, heavy caliber automatic pistol.

"I hove that up in the spiller, Bill," Marston added.

The deputy marshal took the gun and read the number on the butt. He drew a memorandum book from his pocket and turned a page.

"Ase Lewis's gun," he announced. "It's the number given to me by a hardware

man in Ketchikan, where Lewis bought it. Ase Lewis did this job."

The marshal's gaze came to rest upon the gigantic figure of Hod Burrows. "Five thousand easy iron men, big fellow, if you take Ase Lewis."

Hod Burrows flushed as the men of the trap crew broke into raucous laughter. He turned away and walked along the top of the lead to shore.

Half an hour later, when the speed boat had departed on its quest to locate the hangout of Ase Lewis, Hod reappeared at the spiller, traveling this time in his own little power craft. He made fast to the ladder and mounted to the deck. The former watchman approached Billy Mitchell and drew an old tobacco sack from his pocket.

"Billy, I figure maybe that pirate got away with the equivalent of a hundred or so Tyees. Here! This will make it about right. Sorry I let him pirate you. This ought to square it."

Hod counted out three hundred dollars, laid the bills in Mitchell's hand, and started down the ladder to his boat, in which he had his blanket roll, a sheet iron stove and boxes of provisions.

"Say, now, Hod!" Mitchell called after him. "If you feel like this about that pirate job, why, it's good proof you didn't sell me out. You take back this money. I was kind of hot under the collar. Might as well come back onto the job watching again to-night, Hod."

Hod shook his head, got into his boat, and cast off.

"Ahoy, Hod!" Old Man Marston called derisively. "You going out to collect that five thousand?"

"I might," answered Hod gravely. "You can never tell. One thing you can warp to and make fast—if ever I and Ase Lewis cross up, right there I and him get even for good and all. You can snub to that."

The little power boat chugged away and disappeared around a promontory of Orcas Island.

IV

WITH a gentle grating sound the power boat thrust its prow up onto the sloping, yellow sands of a crescent beach. Hod leaped ashore, carrying the painter, which he made fast to the end of a drift log. He climbed the bank and followed along a

narrow trail, which ended in the dooryard of a small log cabin. A girl stood upon the step. She welcomed Hod with a glad smile and outstretched arms.

"Why, Hod," she said, "what fair tide fetches you warping in? This time of day usually you're asleep. Don't stand out there. Come on in."

The girl lifted her hands to his shoulders and held up a smiling, expectant face. Almost roughly he put her away.

"I got a terrible disagreeable job laying just forward," he declared, his voice harsh and unnatural.

"What, Hod? What?" she asked concernedly.

"First place," he replied, trying to avoid her glance, "I got to know exact, Eena, how you hold your bargain word?"

"I don't understand, Hod. You mad at me about something?"

"No, I hain't mad. But I got to know just how you look at it after you pass your word to a party about something terrible important. Now I and you have been articted to marry for a year."

"More than a year," she corrected. "It's a year the sixth of last May you give me a polished moon shell for a love lode, and I crocheted a necktie for you with lots of red into it. It's more than a year. Why? You sure you hain't mad at me over something, Hod?"

He shook his head. "Before I and you was articted to marry, Eena, why, you had passed your word to another man, hadn't you?"

"Yes," she replied with some heat. "You know all about it, and knew all about it the very first liking word ever you spoke to me. You know, too, it's four years since I saw that other man. He disappeared; never wrote, or sent word, nothing. You know all about that, too, Hod. Tell me plain what you got in your mind, and what the *pukpuk* is."

"The *pukpuk* is," said Hod, repeating the familiar Sound Indian word for trouble, "that you was articted to him once, though, honest and aboveboard. You never freed him from his bargain word, nor him you."

"How could I? He might have been dead. What are you driving at exact, Hod?"

"I just been thinking, Eena, that, after all, come good luck or bad, come hell or high water, hain't a love bargain word above

all words to be kept by man or woman? Hain't they? You give this man your word, and you took hissen. Hain't that so, Eena?"

The girl's fine brown eyes began to harden. Her red lips drew themselves into a thin line.

"If you mean, Hod, that you've changed your mind, why, be man enough to say so plain. Don't flounder, sheer this way and that, if you don't love me any more. If you're taking this way to cast free, don't love me any more—"

He turned eyes of misery toward her. "Love you, Eena! You was modeled special for me. Love you!"

He smothered a groan and hung his head dejectedly. Impulsively the girl flung her arms about him, but, sternly, Spartanly, he put her away.

"I know," she said, drawing a quick breath. "I know. I thought I saw a wisp of smoke hanging over Matia Island yesterday where I have seen no smoke for four years, since he went away. I know. He has come back—Ase Lewis."

"Yes," said the big man soberly, "he's back—Ase Lewis."

"But, Hod," she protested, "the promise I gave was to the Ase Lewis that used to be, not the Ase Lewis of now. That crippled, monster body, that makes a party crawl to look at—why, you can't expect me—the heart and soul of him terrible even than his body—my promise was never to the Ase Lewis that is, never."

"Is it for us to say, Eena, that the twists can't be fetched out of his heart and soul by a square deal, even if his broke body can't never be healed? That's what I been thinking. You say he never come a-near you after he got stove up, never wrote, nothing. You know why? He was shamed, him that had been so strong and *skookum*, ashamed."

Hod clenched his great fists, and went on, tensely:

"Nothing burns the soul of a man, turns him plumb frantic and wild, like shame before the eyes of the woman he loves. Ase just couldn't a-bear it to have you look on the wreck of a strong man. So he crawled off like a sick rat, to die. I would have, too, in his place. Oh, Eena, it was terrible. I can see him now, legs, arms, back twisted, broke, smashed, that a second before was the *skookumest* man on Puget Sound. God!"

A calm, portentous, threatening almost, had come over the girl.

"You mean, Hod, it's my duty—to go back—keep my bargain word with Ase Lewis—hide what I feel—live lies— You think I ought—though I never loved him, never, like I do you?"

Her words ended in a tearing sob. Wildly she flung her arms aloft. Then she burst upon Hod with shrill abuse:

"You lied to me! You never loved me, that gives me up so easy, into the hands of a monster! I hate you! Go away from me, Hod!"

Gently he seized the flailing arms, and held firmly the little, quivering hands.

"You know I didn't lie, Eena, about me loving you. Whether you go back to Ase, him that you give your artiled word to, that's for you to say. As for me, I see my duty plain. When I so see it, come hell or high water, I do it. I'm going now, to Matia Island, and make up to Ase Lewis far as I can for his broke up back and crooked soul. I'm going."

Resolutely the big man turned toward the beach. Half a dozen steps he took, came to a pause, and looked back. Slowly he retraced his steps.

"Do you think, Eena, it would be so terrible wrong, if just once, for the very last time, I kissed you? Will you let me, the very last?"

When he had kissed her, she stood looking up at the sky, her expression rapt, seraphic.

"Hod," she said, "if you that I know loves me can give me up for duty, why, I, too, can give up—what's dearest in all the world. Come hell or high water, I'll do my duty, too. I'll go to Matia Island with you, Hod."

For a space they clung to each other, sobbing, talking incoherent gibberish. Then, arm in arm, they went down the trail, got into the power boat, and headed away toward Matia Island.

V

CROSSING the channel that lies between Sucia and Matia Islands, Hod Burrows scanned the bay closely, north, south, and west. Driving his power boat around to the north side of Matia, he beached it in a tiny cove. Still to the northward, at a distance of six or seven miles, lay the Canadian line.

Hod drew a worn tobacco sack from his pocket and tossed it down upon the thwart.

"Give that money to Ase," he said huskily. "I won't tie up the boat, Eena. You hold her with a boat hook. I figure the quicker you and Ase is across the line into Canada, the better. I won't be long."

He turned into the dense brush, and began swiftly mounting the hill. On the very top of the ascent, but sheltered by a thicket of madroña and fir, stood the little cabin. To the rear of the house an immense gray boulder disputed the right of way with the tangled undergrowth. Hod climbed to the top of the rock and scanned the bay all about.

Away to the south and east a speck showed upon the surface of the water. That might be a boat. Others than Eena might have detected the wisp of smoke issuing from the crest of Matia Hill. The search for the fish pirate, Hod felt, would be continued.

He took a second look at the speck that probably was a boat, slid down the rock, and approached the cabin. From within sounded the rake and shuffle of heavy feet dragging over a rough puncheon floor. Hod walked up to the split plank door and knocked with a heavy, purposeful hand.

A rifle shot answered him, and a steel-jacketed ball tore through the timber beside his head. Hod burst open the door, sprang within, and struck up the rifle that was leveled at his breast, flirting the weapon into a far corner of the room.

Although Ase Lewis attacked with the fury of a wounded wild cat, the big man seized and held the thin wrists and lifted the misshapen body in his arms.

"Just sheer often that squirming, Ase," Hod rebuked him gently. "You lay still. I aim to pack you to the beach. Eena Collins, she hain't forgot you, Ase, nor her promise; she's waiting for you. Lay still. You're terrible hard to pack when you tantrum around so. Lay still."

"Let me down, Hod," said Lewis, when the giant had nearly reached the bottom of the hill with his burden. "If she—I don't want her to see me being lugged like a sick dog. Let me down."

Hod lowered the fish pirate to his feet, and Lewis went shambling and dragging through the brush and out onto the open beach.

"Keep going north," Hod commanded. "Shove the spark clean over to the brass, Eena. They's a boat in the offing."

Ase Lewis stood at the prow of the boat,

looking at Eena. She returned his glance and tried to smile.

"You going with me, Eena?" Lewis asked, tremulously. "You see what I am—know what I am."

"Ase," she answered, "pass your word that you go straight from this minute, and I'll go with you. Do you promise?"

Lewis swallowed hard, nodded his head vigorously, and climbed into the power boat. Hod lifted the prow and almost flung the craft free. Eena started the engine. The boat turned and headed away to the north.

The girl twisted her body upon the thwart and waved to Hod. But he had turned his back and was climbing the hill toward the Lewis cabin.

VI

THE dot to the east and south that Hod had feared might be a boat, was a gray speed craft, tremendously engined, the staccato exhaust of its twelve cylinders ripping the air like gunfire. It was coming, that speed boat, in full stride—and headed toward Matia Island.

If only it would land on the south side, and remain there for just a few minutes, the pudgy, lumbering power boat would have a chance to make the Canadian line.

Hod dashed into the cabin and flung wood into the stove. A handful of wet moss tossed in upon the blaze sent a spiral of black smoke out over the tree tops.

Obviously it was the intention of the speed boat to circle Matia Island. A few hundred yards farther on the present course and the fleeing power boat to the north would undoubtedly be discovered.

Almost instantly, when the smoke began to ascend from the cabin, the speeder changed its course and drove straight toward Matia. Hod's ruse had worked.

"I just got to keep 'em busy occupied till Ase and Eena get away," the giant communed, half aloud. "Just got to."

The speed boat beached itself, and three men leaped ashore. Hod seized Ase Lewis's rifle from the corner of the room, ran to the door, took a quick aim, and fired.

A chunk of bark chipped out of a tree just above the head of one of the three men. A second shot shattered a dead clamshell at the feet of another. A fusillade of shots answered this second bullet, ripping off some of the cedar shakes just above Hod's head.

"I just got to keep 'em busy occupied till they get away," Hod mused grimly, working the slide of the rifle.

Cautiously he thrust his head around the corner of the cabin.

"Scatter out," he heard an authoritative voice shout down by the beach. "Scatter out! Be careful! He's a killer! Shoot to hit! Take no chances!"

Desultory firing from varying directions told that the three men had scattered out. Occasionally a bullet zipped into the shake roof of the cabin, or buried itself in the log sides. To make sure that the attention of the invading officers kept itself centered upon the cabin, and to permit them no leisure in which to discover the power boat plowing away toward the north, Hod sent steel-jacketed bullets crashing into the tree tops near any location whence a shot had come.

Finally he pumped the last shell out of the magazine. By now, he reasoned, the power boat would be across the line. He flung down the rifle and started toward a tiny open space before the cabin. He would call out to the officers and surrender, and let them discover the hoax that had been worked upon them.

As he emerged from the cabin, a sharp crackling noise arrested his attention. A smothering billow of resinous smoke came rolling up the hill. The officers had fired the wood to burn him out. The dense trees, tinder dry, would go like gunpowder. Already pillars of fire roared up the pitch seams of the tall firs.

Choking and gasping, Hod ran to the north, toward the part of the island the fire had not yet reached. A shot sounded. A bullet tore across his ribs.

He staggered and plunged head foremost into a mass of brush. Faster, more furiously, the flames came roaring up the hill.

VII

Hod tried to open his eyes, but could not; the lids seemed glued together. The hand and arm of one side were as dead and inert as sticks of wood. A strange coldness pervaded that side. He felt himself lifted, borne a distance, and placed on a pile of blankets. A breeze blew upon him. He was being taken somewhere in a boat. That was all he knew.

"Can you hear what I say," spoke a voice in his ear.

"Yeah," said Hod through swollen, blis-

tered lips. "I can hear, but not good. Did Ase Lewis get away?"

"Yes, he got away."

"Good! I'm square with him now; part ways at least."

"Hod," continued the voice, "this is Billy Mitchell speaking. I came with the two marshals. Why did you let Ase Lewis pirate my trap? Why did you all but give up your life helping him get away? You ain't a crook, naturally."

"I'll tell you why I helped Ase off," Hod replied, thickly; "why I didn't outright hook and handle him on the trap after I seen it was him. I'll tell you why. Five years ago I run the brail hoist on the Red Star trap. Ase, a greener, come to work. Careless—no excuse at all—I dropped a half ton brail of fish onto him, stove him all up, arms, legs, back; and his heart and spirit, too. I made Ase Lewis the joke of a man that he is. I done it. Former, Ase Lewis was as *skookum* a boy as ever stood in tarpaulin pants. I made him what he is. Now you know."

When Hod was able to leave the Anacortes Hospital, Billy Mitchell, advancing the argument that a man of sense wasn't apt to repeat a mistake, prevailed upon him to return to the trap to operate the brail hoist. Hod's left leg had a permanent crook at the knee, and the hand of that side looked like the talons of some great bird. His face was seamed and livid with scar tissue.

On a Friday evening, when by the law Puget Sound traps must close down until Sunday, Hod was hoisting the captured Tyees out of the spiller, and he suddenly caught the sound of an engine exhaust. He did not dare to look around. That was the exhaust of his little old speed boat. He could have told it among a million.

Resolutely he set himself to the business of hoisting fish. The last brail load came up out of the spiller just as he heard his name called. He lowered away the brail, shut down his engine, and hobbled to the edge of the spiller.

Eena sat in the boat, looking up at him,

and smiling gloriously. There was no sign upon her face that she saw aught but the robust Hod of old.

"I came to take you on over to supper," she said. "Clam chowder the way you like it, Hod. Don't you want to come?"

"I guess—maybe, now—I'd like to come, Eena."

"Come, then," she urged. "No reason why you shouldn't."

VIII

Hod let himself down the ladder and got into the boat. Eena spun the wheel, and the pudgy craft headed away toward Sucia Island.

"I think I know what you're thinking, Hod," she said gently. "I'll tell you all about it. You're wondering—I know what you're thinking. I just got back this morning. Ase Lewis died in Westminster Hospital yesterday. We landed in Westminster after we got away from Matia. He went to get a marriage license. He was wanted on the Canada side, too. A constable arrested him. On the way to jail, Ase started a fight. The constable shot him. They let me into the hospital where Ase was, under a guard. I knew you would have wanted me to. I took care of Ase best I could till he died."

A little timorously she slipped her round arm about Hod.

"Here I am, Hod, dear. Are you glad?"

"Glad? Here I be, too, Eena, busted and barnacled, but here. Glad!"

She arose to her feet and stood before him. Both her hands she placed alongside the scarred and flame-seared face that her eyes of love saw only fair and smooth as it had been before.

For some moments then the power boat traveled a wabbling and erratic course. There was no hand upon the wheel.

Finally Hod reached, spun the wheel, and brought the craft squarely about.

"Where we going to, Hod?" she asked.

"Anacortes," he answered, "where wedding papers can be bought and preachers hired."

DAYBREAK

STARS that fade slowly; the faint scent of roses;

Silence unbroken for a breathing space;

A tremulous song through all the shadowy closes,

Then in the gloaming, my beloved, your face!

Sennett Stephens

The Claying of Henry

YOUNG MR. PINFORD EXPERIMENTED WITH A FEMININE AID
TO BEAUTY, AND FOR A WHILE HE THOUGHT
HIS NAME WAS MUD

By Wilbur D. Nesbit

IGNOMINY was a weak word for the situation. Henry Pinford chewed upon the cud of bitterness.

Here was he, a young man— Well, if not a young man, at least a more than sizable youth—indeed, of the age of eighteen. And large for his age.

And here was he, Henry Pinford, subjected to the thoughtless, careless, willful request—nay, demand—of his mother, that he remain at home that afternoon and evening and keep his eye on his four-year-old sister!

Ye gods! In all history was ever such torture inflicted upon a fine soul?

And his mother had asked him to do this unmanly task in tones which gave no slightest hint that she was aware that nursemaiding was a shame and a disgrace for a man. True, the nursemaid herself had had to go home because her mother was at the point of death. And it was cook's day out, so she could not be pressed into service.

"Bernice will take her nap," mother had said. "In fact, she will be asleep before I leave. I'm on the committee at the club bazaar, and afterward there will be the annual club dinner—then we'll come home, along about ten o'clock. I've put Bernice's milk and bread and butter in the refrigerator. Cook promised to come back early—but she'll probably forget it. All you need to do is to help yourself to the nice sandwiches I've left for you, give Bernice her supper, and she'll sing herself to sleep. I'll attend to undressing her when we come home."

And mother had sallied forth as gayly as if she were not leaving a trampled soul behind her.

Henry moodily walked about the room. He caught his reflection in a mirror, and

paused to study himself. Yes, his brow was high, as Ilfa Bennet had assured him. Ilfa was the angel who made a paradise of their street by living two doors beyond the Pinfords.

Others might laugh at the girl's mother, in secret, and wonder where in the name of time she ever found such a name as "Ilfa" to wish on the poor child; but to Henry "Ilfa" held within its two syllables all the ineffable music that Edgar Allan Poe had managed to conjure into his poem about Annabel Lee, as well as the pulsing romance with which Poe had imbued "To Helen."

Poe was a strong favorite with Henry. And now that dark melancholy rested on his fair young brow, his thoughts were more and more in the Poe cast. Gloom sat within his heart, and brooding ire was throned within his soul's most secret chambers.

He continued his study of the baleful countenance in the glass. He started. There was no use trying to conceal it, no chance to laugh it off. There were pimples on his face. In fact, a fresh crop had developed within the last twenty-four hours.

He rubbed his chin, his cheeks, his forehead. Even where no pimples showed, he believed he could feel the tiny lumps which foretold their early arrival.

"I'll look like a strawberry by to-morrow," he muttered, hollowly.

"What I need is lots of fresh air, and here I've got to stick around in the house and play watchman over a kid!"

Thoughtfully he searched his pockets for a cigarette. At last one gave itself up, after a vain attempt at concealment in an upper vest pocket.

"Father says cigarettes cause pimples," he told himself, "but if tobacco is an anti-

septic, I don't see why it isn't good for pimples."

Holding the cigarette carelessly between the index and second finger, as he had observed J. Willet Fortescue, the eminent photoplay star, do in one of his scenes where he scorned the haughty father and wooed the timorous heroine and defied the perfidious villain, Henry turned away from the mirror. A recollection flashed into his mind.

"Why not?" he asked himself, defiantly. "Why not? Plenty of time. I'll be here by myself, you might say, all the rest of the afternoon and evening."

II

THE memory that had come to him was of the day before, when he had been conversing with Bill Kersten, the genial purveyor of strawberry sundaes, banana splits, and other concoctions of a first-class soda fountain. Henry had opined to Bill that he believed too many of these rich mixtures were bad for a fellow's blood, especially in the evenings.

"Stands to reason," he said, "that when a fellow puts a lot of that heavy stuff inside himself he gives his alimentary outfit too much work, and the residue is taken up by the blood stream and forced out through the capillaries and clogs the pores, and there you are. I'll bet that's what makes these pimples on my face."

"Got 'em anywhere else?" Bill asked.

"No. Just on my face."

"Well, it ain't acne or erysipelas or eczema," Bill stated, gravely, as became one slightly allied with the medical profession. "So it ain't in your blood. My opinion is that your pores are clogged. Stop a man's pores up, and something's got to bust, I tell you. Now, your pores has got stopped up, and that irritates 'em. So they get infected from the outside, and a pimple grows."

"Well, what's the answer?" Henry demanded, interestedly.

"Get your pores open."

"What 'll I open 'em with?" Henry inquired, scornfully, lapping up the last of his Dizzy Dream, a frothy-topped temptation in a tall glass, the concoction having a base of vanilla ice cream drenched with chocolate sirup, adorned with cherries, berries, nuts, and sliced bananas, invigorated by a few spurts of soda, and finished with two heaping dabs of whipped cream, then

given a lingering good-by kiss of powdered cinnamon.

"What 'll I open 'em with? Tooth-picks?" Henry insisted, licking his lips.

"Mud," Bill prescribed.

"Mud?"

"Yes. One of these here beauty clays. There's no end of 'em. Women have 'em put on in the beauty parlors—call 'em packs. Men get 'em in the barber shops—call 'em Clayzetta massages—dollar and a quarter each."

"I don't believe I'd ever have a dollar and a quarter's worth of pimples."

"You don't need to go to any barber shop. Your mother bought some of that stuff here last week. All you got to do is to strop up your old safety and give yourself a clean shave. Then mop your mug with a hot towel to get the pores willing to come open. Then put on the mud. Open come the pores, out come the clogs, and off you step, looking like a motion picture bridegroom."

The idea had intrigued Henry—at the time. But it had passed, like the remembrance of the taste of the Dizzy Dream. And now there came back to him a fierce longing for something from the soda fountain. But it was not to be, for him, at that hour. No, indeed. In the nursery slumbered Bernice, and Henry, faithful sentinel, might not leave his post.

His pacing led him to the bathroom. He opened the medicine chest, and there sat the comely jar of Clayzetta. He took off the lid and sniffed at the slate-colored contents. From the paste exuded a tolu scent.

"Smells like chewing gum," Henry observed to himself. "Might as well try the stuff. It can't hurt me. I'm not supposed to take it internally."

He read and reread the instructions for application. He did not take time to pursue them far enough to inform himself as to the completion of the beautifying process. Bill had told him to put the clay on his face, and the label told him in its turn how to do it.

Off came his collar and tie. He lathered and shaved himself. He mopped his face with a hot towel until it was so red that the pimples were lost in his blazing complexion.

Then he applied the clay with liberal fingers. Up to the roots of his hair, over every available section of his countenance, and well down on his neck, he spread a thick coating of the highly praised earth.

If a thin application was good, then it stood to reason that a thick one was just as much better as it was thicker. So he concluded his treatment when he had placed about an eighth of an inch of Clay-zetta upon his face.

He studied himself in the bathroom mirror. A greenish gray and utterly expressionless mask looked out at him; its only sign of life being two deep, bright eyes that were strangely incongruous in such a drab setting.

III

HE strolled back to the den. There he idly shoved the billiard balls around the table for a few moments. Then he found the unsmoked half of his cigarette, lighted it, took up a magazine and sat down by a window. The clay began to set. Weird tinglings took hold upon Henry's skin. His upper and nether eyelids commenced to draw tightly. The tip of his nose developed an unscratchable itching.

"She's giving the high sign to these pimples," Henry thought, and with the thought started to smile. Only started. The muscles of his lips and cheeks were set in solid steel. A numbness, indeed, caught hold upon his lips—such a numbness as attacks one when a wintry gale bites one's face. In this case, Henry's face was not cold.

"Wonder how long it takes until it falls off?" Henry asked his inner self, but no information came in response to his mental interrogation.

And now, every minutest section of his face was drawing and tingling. The corners of his eyes, the skin about his nostrils, the tender throat, the thin skin of the temples, the majestic roundness of his brow—all set up a clamorous itching, and drawing, and burning.

"Better go into the bathroom and knock the blamed stuff off," Henry thought. "Mebbe if it stays on too long the pores suck it in and get clogged worse than ever."

He started to the bathroom, but from the nursery came a cry:

"Mamma, I want my milk!"

Bernice! She had to waken at that moment, of course. Oh, well, a few minutes more or less wouldn't make any material difference to his pores. He would run downstairs, get Bernice's milk and bread and butter for her, then knock this asphalt off his face.

To the refrigerator, then back up the

stairs and into the nursery, where Bernice was sitting up in her little bed.

"Here's your milk," Henry tried to say, but his lips were wooden, and refused coöperation with his tongue. He extended the glass of milk, and Bernice, with one affrighted gaze, threw her arms wildly in the air, knocking the glass from one hand and the bread and butter from the other, and topped that action by a scream which must have echoed from the frowning bluff beyond the river.

"What the dickens!" Henry tried to say, but Bernice gathered her breath and delivered a second scream even more vibrant than her first. Henry essayed to comfort and soothe her, only evoking more shrieks.

He left, first taking the bread and butter from the floor and placing it inside the crib. Then he started down after more milk.

This time he was more careful as he returned with a full glass. There was something wrong with Bernice, he knew. Oh, well, she had always been sort of petulant on awakening. But petulance was no name for what affected Bernice. At sight of Henry she again gave a demonstration of vocal powers hitherto unsuspected.

"There! There!" soothed Henry.

It was all he could think of to say. He had heard older people apply this incantation to children when they were crying, with great effectiveness. But all the there-thering in the world wasn't going to quiet Bernice. When Henry drew near her, the cries grew all the louder.

There was something mystic in this, Henry reasoned. He experimented. He approached Bernice. Louder wails followed. He drew off. The wails assumed a lower register.

If the volume of the noise decreased in proportion to the square of his distance, then he had evolved a theorem concerning crying children. He placed the glass of milk on a convenient table and tried out the theorem. Sure enough, the nearer he got to Bernice the more and louder she yelled, and the farther away he retired the calmer her voice.

He turned and left the room, and Bernice resumed her attention to the bread and butter, pausing now and then to catch her breath and stifle a belated sob.

"She just don't want me around," Henry told himself. He walked into the bathroom and studied his reflection in the mirror.

"'Bout time to get this off," he mumbled, uneasily.

IV

IN places the mud was cracking—it had the effect of rare Japanese ware. Little crackles sputtered in fine lines all over his countenance. Out of the dull, dead, expressionless gray-green mask his eyes gleamed uncannily.

He must get the mud off, but how? He tried flaking it off with his finger nails. This was not satisfactory. The top surface came away, leaving still a layer clinging to his skin. His finger nails slipped on an exceedingly hard surface and made several scratches along his cheek.

"Better be careful," he thought. "Might infect myself with my own fingers if I scratch too hard."

He tried a hair brush, then a flesh brush. But, aside from putting sort of a smoother surface and a slight gloss on the clay, he accomplished little. He picked up a manicure file and tapped swiftly on the mud with its handle, expecting to break up the composition and allow it to fall from his face. But it did not yield.

A cry for milk came from Bernice. Henry hurried to her room, to be greeted by a fresh outburst of crying when he heaved into sight. Doggedly he went right to her, and was determined to take her up and quiet her in his arms.

As he bent over, endeavoring to speak gently to her, there was a rush behind him, and he was seized and flung aside by two sturdy arms. The arms were instantly wrapped about Bernice, who clung to the newcomer agitatedly.

Henry wheeled, to gaze into the face of the cook. Cook had kept her promise to come home early.

"You brute!" shrilled the cook.

Then she got a full, unobstructed view of Henry's face, and with Bernice in her arms she took the stairs down three at a time, lifting up her voice in a wild alarm:

"Thieves! Burglars! Kidnapers! Police! Help!"

Henry followed her downstairs, trying to overtake her and explain. He might as well have tried to capture a fleeting express train. The cook heaved herself and Bernice out the back door and across lots to the neighbors.

"Oh, shucks!" Henry mused, leaning against the kitchen door frame. "She's

crazy, anyhow. Wouldn't wait till I explained things. Guess she got scared at my face, too. That's it! That's what made Bernice cry that way. Thing for me to do is go see Bill and find out how to get this stuff off."

Obviously this was no matter for public performance. If his appearance produced such alarming effects upon the cook and Bernice, then it was not for him to stroll down the much traveled street. These things could be handled more discreetly. There were alleys.

Henry slipped swiftly out on the back porch and into the yard, only to hear the cook shouting: "There he goes, Missus Morton!"

If the cook thought that Mrs. Morton was going to leap forth in pursuit, she overlooked two ruling factors in the situation. For one, Mrs. Morton weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, and was averse to sprints. For another, Mrs. Morton was nearly in a state of collapse, due to the cook's incoherent narrative concerning a kidnaper, burglar, murderer, fire bug, and safe blower who was practicing all his black arts in the Pinford home. Mrs. Morton was sitting back and breathing hard, and that was all she could do.

Henry made the alley and sped lightly to the first street. There he paused and scanned the thoroughfare in both directions. He dashed across the roadway and into the continuation of the alley.

Halfway through that he came upon a colored man energetically greasing an automobile. It was Mose Green, and the car was that of his employer, Druggist Wheeler, who also employed Bill.

Mose took one look at Henry, straightened up and departed, leaving his hat and coat and grease gun behind. He gave Henry a fair deal, for he left in the same direction in which Henry had been headed.

But not for many years had that colored man made such speed. His feet were seldom on the ground. Rather they floated in the air, supported only by his flapping legs.

And as he ran he prayed for more speed, intermingling this plea with fervent promises to abandon all and sundry evil habits, such as an addiction to "sympathetic" gin, devotion to the galloping dominoes, and illegal catering to an appetite for chicken.

Before reaching the end of the alley he glanced back over his shoulder, and seeing

that Henry was following, crashed through a garden gate and disappeared around a house, working havoc to a privet hedge that had received a most careful bobbing that very morning.

Henry was amused at the flight of Moses Green. He essayed a smile, but the clay by this time had set firmly, and his muscles of risibility were apparently atrophied.

"Gosh!" was his thought. "I wonder what this stuff might do to me if I don't get it off. I'd better hurry."

V

WHEELER's drug store, where Bill Kersten toyed with the soda apparatus, was not on the route governed by the alley. It was a matter of six blocks east and two blocks south. Henry negotiated another street crossing, and then stopped to plan further movements.

It seemed best to him that he should cut across lots, coming out on a corner. But he knew the corner, and he knew it was the intersection of quiet streets. He could take chances on that, and save time. Perspiration was manifesting itself by this time on all parts of him save his countenance. That remained imperturbable, calm, hard as a Babylonian brick.

Into a back yard, diagonally across that and over a fence he went. This was a broad lot. He sped through it and dashed around the corner of a commodious residence. In the side yard two women were stretching lace curtains on frames to dry.

It was Henry's intention, because of the speed of his approach, and because time was an essential, to race between the two women. This decision was formed on the spur of the moment, it is true. But he did not know the women were there until they impinged upon his vision as he hurtled around the corner of the house, and then he was compelled to adopt the Napoleonic stroke just mentioned.

Unfortunately, he had not time to apprise the ladies of his idea. One of them was middle-aged; the other not quite. One was plump, the other slender. Each had her mouth full of pins and was wrestling with an obstinate lace curtain, which, with the fiendishness of damp lace curtains, was determined never, never to allow itself to be stretched and yanked into shape to fit its frame.

Henry's slapping footsteps caused them both to look up. The plump one called

fervently upon her Heavenly Father, the slender one inquired of the circumambient sky: "What is it? *What is it?*?"

She was the one who ripped her lace curtain from its inadequate fastenings, and hurled it into Henry's face. This was done, not by intent, but through reflex action or subconscious muscle response. The plump one had been leaning over the side of her curtain frame, trying to pull the edge of the curtain into place in that manner. She pushed frame, curtain and all, in Henry's path.

Both women hastened houseward, ignoring such petty obstacles as flowering plants, bridal wreath bushes, lawn benches, and other impedimenta of a well disposed yard. It was the lawn swing that nearly caused the death of the slim one, but she untangled herself from its embrace in time to make her escape from what she firmly believed was a fate worse than death. The steps of each of the women were punctuated by shrill yelps and ululations—all of which fanned the wings which they had lent to Henry's feet.

Henry had not paused. No book of etiquette would approve his conduct in the circumstances. But Henry by now was above etiquette. He should have stopped, lifted his hat, referred airily to the weather, and spoken a polite apology for his unfortunate intrusion.

Instead, he stepped into the curtain the stout one placed before him, clutched wildly at the one the slender one flung in his face, dragging the fabric down until it swept about his neck and draped itself about his shoulders like a toga.

Henry had disappeared before the two women had reached upstairs windows to look out and watch his expected wrecking of the premises. He was well on his way by that time. He had leaped across the street, ducked through another yard, and doubled back behind a garage.

Here he disentangled himself from the lace curtains, throwing them scornfully upon the ground. As he did so his eyes lighted up at the discovery of what evidently was to be his salvation. On the ground, near the wall of the garage, was a pasteboard hatbox. It was full of waste paper—crumpled tissue paper mostly. Some one had purchased a new hat and had thus disposed of its container.

It was not such an attractive thing, but it would serve. Henry took out his knife

and cut two round holes in the side of the hat box. He then lifted it up and placed it over his head, allowing it to come right down and rest upon his shoulders. The two holes gave him vision; the box concealed his fear-inspiring face.

VI

No need to run, now. He stepped forth with leisurely tread. As a matter of discretion, he again held to the alley route. Fortunately he reached a cross alley in the next block, and there he turned in the direction of the drug store.

If fortune favored him he could pursue this course, and it would bring him directly to the rear door of the drug emporium. Once there, a few words with Bill; the needed information would be furnished, the clay would be removed, and he would be a free man and could face the world with haughty mien.

This thought lessened his cautiousness and almost led to his undoing. At the next sidewalk he did not pause to reconnoiter, but walked boldly forth. And he bumped right into a policeman, who was strolling majestically along that very sidewalk, his hands behind him twiddling with his baton.

"What's this?" asked the officer, halting. "What's goin' on, young man?"

"Masquerade," was what the quick-witted Henry endeavored to reply, but his stiff lips could not accomplish it.

"Come! Come! Off with that!"

Without waiting for Henry, he poked the hatbox up with his club.

A glimpse of Henry's face caused the officer to drop the hatbox quickly.

"What the devil?" he growled. "Is it a disease you have? Where are you goin'?"

"'Ug 'tore," Henry mumbled.

"Drug store?" echoed the policeman, with rare analytical power. "Then it must be somethin' desperate—to turn your face that color. You'll stick with me and I'll get the wagon, and it's you to the county hospital for the health department to take a look at you. Come with me to the corner, my boy."

His big hand seized Henry's arm, and the lad was led to the corner, where the officer opened the patrol box and made ready to call the wagon.

"Stand still. I'll handcuff you to this lamp-post if you try to get away."

Henry nodded. The officer rang headquarters and waited for the reply.

A grocery delivery truck first came along. Henry leaped for it, and swung over the tailboard, with the officer shouting. The driver looked back.

Henry looked up at him through the hatbox. The bottom had been punched out, and Henry's head, with its ghoulish face and unhuman eyes, was poked through, the sides of the box, forming a sort of a ruche.

"Git goin'!" Henry managed to command, and the driver hurriedly obeyed.

Henry looked back and saw the policeman giving up the chase, having stubbed his toe on a manhole cover in the middle of the street, and having jolted off his helmet thereby.

The light truck whipped around the corner. Henry waited his chance and slipped over the tailboard as they reached the alley he desired. He then resumed his course drugstoreward, panting.

The driver of the truck, not daring to look back, nearly had a fight with the traffic cop who stopped him. That uniformed worthy insinuated that the chauffeur was crazy when he claimed that a wild man was hiding in the rear of the truck.

Did you ever trudge through a trackless jungle, losing the trail and finding it again, and, after giving up all hope of ever reaching civilization, emerge into a friendly settlement? Did you ever foot it doggedly across the blistering, unmarked desert, with nothing to guide you, and, almost at your last gasp, round a shifting sand hill and be greeted by a prospector's camp?

No? Neither did many others, but either of those experiences and its finale might compare with the elation that surged into Henry Pinford's heart when, after much skulking and painful efforts at concealment, he eventually reached the back door of the drug store. His chest heaved with a mighty sigh of relief.

The back door was ajar. There was no one behind the prescription case. He tiptoed in and peeked about the side of the case, meaning to signal to Bill Kerston to come to him. The irony of destiny slapped him in the Clayzettaed face! Bill was not there.

Henry swiftly realized that it was Bill's supper time, and that the proprietor of the store was relieving him. No use talking to the proprietor; it would take too long to explain.

Henry turned to leave. He heard a movement in the basement. He went half-

way down the basement stairs, hoping against hope that Bill might be there, unpacking goods. Some one most evidently was unpacking bottles.

VII

At the foot of the stairs he saw Moses Green taking bottles of hair tonic from a box. The janitor looked up and saw Henry, for the second time that late afternoon. Once more it was his urgent cue to evaporate.

There was only one way out of that basement, and that way led past Henry, but Mose took it, scattering hair tonic bottles to the four corners of the basement. Hoarsely howling, he ducked his head, shielding it with his arm, and went by Henry.

Again a Napoleonic decision ensued. To follow the janitor would mean contact with the druggist and the three or four customers, who had deserted their sodas and were rushing with the druggist to the space back of the prescription case. Going up the stairs being out of the question, Henry went down, quietly turning off the electric light in the basement by means of the button at the foot of the stairs.

"What's the matter down there?" the druggist asked.

Henry knew better than to answer, although he could have assured the druggist that very little was wrong.

"Mose ain't down there," said one of the customers. "He went out the back door like a bat shot out of perdition." He used a much shorter word than perdition.

"Dinged if I can imagine what was the matter with that darky," the druggist observed. "He came in here awhile ago, all out of breath—seemed to have had a shock of some kind."

Looking from the back door he espied Mose, wavering between return and flight, a hundred yards away.

"Come on back here, Mose!" the druggist commanded. The janitor obeyed. "What happened? What's the matter? What made you yell and run out?"

"I saw somethin'."

"What did you see?"

"I saw somethin'."

That was all Mose could say.

"Well, you quit hitting that demijohn of good-natured alcohol down there, or you'll be seeing some of your dead friends," the druggist advised, and the customers

chuckled. "Go on back down there and finish your work."

"Mistah Wheelah, mah job is yo'ahs right now, ef yo' say I's got to go back in that cellah!"

He was a good janitor. The druggist did not press the point. Instead, he told Mose to go on home and sleep it off, as soon as he had swept out the store, straightened up the things back of the prescription case, and burned the trash that had accumulated in the alley.

And so it was that while dusk deepened over the city, Henry Pinford waited and waited, on the lower step, until at last he heard Moses Green announce that he had fulfilled his responsibilities and was wending his homeward way.

It was now so nearly dark that Henry felt he could emerge without frightening any one, providing he kept in the shadow. Bill had not returned. He had heard the druggist condemning Bill for this, and saying it was Bill's habit to leave him in the lurch.

Just then the telephone bell rang, and the druggist fired Bill over the wire. Henry gathered that Bill had offered some lame excuse for not being able to come back to work that evening.

VIII

PLUNGED anew into the abyss of despair, Henry's mind turned, as all men's minds turn in their hours of anguish, to the lady of his dreams—to Ilfa. Why had he not thought of her before. Ilfa Bennet would sympathize and understand. She would help him. He would arise and go to Ilfa.

Going to Ilfa was a matter of traversing many alleyways, side streets, and a few back yards. This Henry did swiftly and as silently as was consistent with his rate of speed. Several pauses were necessary, in order to avoid pedestrians. But at last he made his way upon the Bennet lawn.

Voices reached him from the broad veranda. One was that of Ilfa—a silvery, bubbling music, accented now and then with mild peals of girlish laughter.

"Oh, George! You are the killingest thing!" she exclaimed.

So that was it! His deadly rival, George MacPherson, was there with Ilfa. The MacPherson rather set himself up as a teller of jocular stories and as a master of apt repartee.

"She's got that hunk of cheese there,"

Henry growled mentally. "Wonder to me she doesn't see how wet he is. Always laughs at his own smartness before he springs it. Gr-r-r!"

Henry sank behind a cluster of shrubbery near the veranda. Stark murder seethed in his heart, grim despair wove its shackles about his consciousness. Would this catastrophe never end? Even the destruction of Pompeii wound up eventually, and the Thirty Years War had its final curtain. But apparently he was doomed to trudge through life seeking information as to how to clear his face.

After unending centuries had crumbled from the shores of time into the silent sea of eternity, George MacPherson was heard to observe that it was time for him to go.

"Don't be in a mad scramble," gurgled Ilfa.

Henry could have taken her ivory throat in his two hands to suppress further language, and he could have done the direful deed with a smile.

"That's kind of yuh," George declared, "but I got to hit the hay early to-night, or the obliging pater will cut me off with a shilling to-morrow. Say, what's become of Hen? Haven't seen him for two days."

"Henry? Why, he was here yesterday evening, but I haven't heard from him to-day, as yet."

Henry assured himself that if she delayed the departure of the MacPherson pest she would hear from him, and in no uncertain tones. Ilfa spared herself that dreadful experience. She urged the MacPherson to come back soon, and stood at the top of the steps as he lightly descended to the walk. George neared him, and Henry arose.

"Say!" he muttered, intending to deliver full and fair warning that no MacPhersons hereafter need apply on the premises harboring Ilfa Bennet.

But George spared him the trouble. George was confronted by a grisly-faced apparition, rising without warning from the midst of a bush—so it impressed him—and mouthing malignant threats.

George stood not upon the order of his going. He departed, not even stopping to recover his hat, which fell from his head in the middle of the street.

IX

HENRY turned toward Ilfa. He beheld a beauteous creature, standing in the full light of the doorway, her hands clasped to

her breast, her features registering surprise, alarm, and wonderment. Henry sped to the steps and up them, calling out as he approached:

"Don't be frightened, Ilfa. It's Henry."

His enunciation was imperfect, for the reasons hereinbefore outlined, but the ears of affection are keen, and Ilfa detected the tones of the adored.

"Why, Henry! Where have you been, and what have you been trying to do to yourself?"

"Come over in the corner, in the shadow, and let me tell you."

Ilfa obeyed. And in a few well chosen words, consisting mainly of inquiries as to how to remove a double portion of Clayzetta from an outraged masculine countenance, Henry laid the case before her.

What the novelists describe as a ripple of mirth answered him. And then Ilfa took him by the hand, led him indoors, and instructed him in the removal of beauty clay.

"You just wash it off, Henry. Goodness! If that isn't just like a man. But I'd think a man would know how to wash dirt off his face."

The sputtering Henry at the kitchen sink did not writhe at her criticism. She had called him a man!

A half hour of sweet conference with Ilfa followed. Then Henry, his face rosy, his shirt and coat bespattered with greenish-gray clay water, hied himself homeward. His mother had not yet returned. The cook was standing guard by Bernice's bed.

So Henry waited until the folks got home, and he allowed the cook to talk herself out. Then he tiptoed to his mother's room.

"Mother," he said, "there wasn't any burglar; there wasn't any kidnaper. Cook was just—just mistaken. I'm awful tired now, mother. To-morrow I'll tell you all about it."

"All right, Henry. But who in the world mused up the bathroom? And who spilled my Clayzetta all over the washstand and everything? It looked terrible when we got home."

"I did, mother. That's what I'm going to tell you about to-morrow," Henry answered, hurrying into his room.

Peace like a river flowed into his soul. His face really looked much better, even if it was still red. And Ilfa had called him a man!

Oh, boy! Hot diggety dog!

The Symptoms of Suzanne

A LAYMAN COULD DIAGNOSE THIS GIRL'S CASE QUICKER THAN
DID THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN—BUT THE TREAT-
MENT WOULD BE THE SAME

By George F. Worts

IT was a glamorous morning in spring. There was a breeze from the south full of restless, plucking fingers. The sun had wheeled into a lively blue sky, smoky and adventurous.

An alluring heliotrope mist blurred the Hudson. A string of garbage scows that seemed motionless in the wake of a silver-plumed tug were barges of romance.

Busses rumbled and bumbled along Riverside Drive. They looked like great green pickles with amputated ends. They were transporting to the lower regions of the yawning city the first of their three great consignments of morning passengers—the works, the clerks, and the shirks.

In the smoker's seat of a down town bus that was almost empty Dr. Allen Marvin sat, smoking his after breakfast cigar, and intently scrutinizing the only other occupant of the bus's top deck. Except in the most inclement weather, he always rode to his office on the top deck of a bus. He enjoyed the rush of air, the deathless thrill of whirling about sharp curves, and the elephantine ease with which the vehicle picked its way through traffic.

Dr. Marvin always reached his office at eight or before; he was, even in this most competitive city on earth, distinctively ambitious. Perhaps that was why he was by way of becoming the city's leading diagnostician at the youthful age of thirty-four. He was truly an adornment to his profession.

It would have been hard for Dr. Marvin to look at the world from any other point of view than a medical one. His grandfather had been a backwoods general practitioner; his father, an eye, ear, and throat specialist; his mother, a trained nurse; and

two of his uncles were surgeons of no mean ability.

Where the ordinary man might go through the day seeing only those things which forced themselves upon his consciousness, Dr. Marvin was seeing faces, and a face to Dr. Marvin was something more than just a face. To him a face was not merely beautiful or ugly, young or old, happy or sad, white or black. He was ever on the watch for symptoms. Every face into which he peered was, to him, a barometer of health.

Dr. Marvin divided humanity into the uninterestingly healthy and the fascinatingly unhealthy. If a face chanced to be aglow with health, even though it were feminine and beautiful, he dismissed it with a glance; but if a face betrayed the symptoms of some interesting disease, Dr. Marvin's interest was captured. On innumerable occasions nothing but the exercise of a Spartan self-control had saved him from stepping up to a victim of this or that disease and putting questions to him, or, as the case may have been, to her.

As he was tall, well built, and handsome, it followed that his intense interest in faces was sometimes misconstrued. Women who were flattered by the eagerness with which this clean-cut, good-looking young man looked into their faces would have been surprised, to say the least, to know that their attraction in his eyes consisted of their betrayal of the presence, perhaps, of gallstone, cachexia, or Addison's disease.

The girl in the seat across the way was already growing restless under his continued scrutiny, but she was not flattered by it as some women would have been. She was distinctly annoyed and distressed, and

she had already assured herself that the distinguished-looking young man with the penetrating gray eyes and the crisp blond mustache was no one she knew.

She could not be much older than twenty-one. Her gray mixing-bowl hat was shabby; her dark-red coat was threadbare in places, and the fur trimming had a mangy look. She might have been pretty if it had not been for her nose.

It was a grotesque nose. It was really a terrible nose; a Punch nose. It was humped and crooked, and it occupied much more space than any nose deserved.

The lay observer would have stopped at the nose. Yet beyond the nose was undeniable loveliness; a sweet red mouth and a pair of large brown eyes surrounded by lustrous long lashes—beautiful eyes.

Dr. Marvin did not see that disfiguring nose at all. It was her luminous eyes that fascinated him. Later on, if his guess was upheld, and if something were not done about it, they would become prominent, and in the end they would protrude like knobs. Every gesture she made—and her hands were not idle a moment—corroborated his guess.

Her energy, Dr. Marvin believed, was burning her up; she was a human dynamo running away with herself. He had observed girls with these symptoms in the offices of corporation medical examiners; girls who were burning up with energy. They would burn for weeks or months, a year, or perhaps longer, and suddenly they would burn out.

He did not realize that he was staring until she turned her head with chin elevated and eyebrows pinched together in a frown. She was small and rather fragile, yet there was something about her chin that is to be observed in the chins of all fighters, something that seemed to say: "I am not easily aroused, but I just dare you to try to take advantage of me!"

The look she addressed to Dr. Marvin should have put the boldest man in his place, but it did not discourage Dr. Marvin. There was that something in his own chin. He bent toward her.

Perhaps it was the adventuresomeness of the spring morning that caused him to cast aside his usual self-restraint, although the book he had been reading the night before may have had more than a little to do with it. He was tremendously interested in glands, and the book had spurred his mind

along delightful new lanes of thought. He believed he had discovered in the girl a victim of incipient Grave's disease.

"I beg your pardon," spoke up Dr. Marvin, "but I am a doctor, and you interest me very much. I wonder if you would mind my asking you some professional questions?"

The nose described a minute circle in the air.

A girl with such a nose could not have been accustomed to being accosted; yet she said, with a most sophisticated air:

"That's a new one."

Dr. Marvin blushed. The lustrous eyes seemed to be sorting out the constituent parts of his soul. He would gladly have retreated, but the girl, evidently deciding that her first guess might have been wrong, gave him another chance.

"Do you think something's the matter with me?"

"I'm not sure," Dr. Marvin answered, "and I'd appreciate it very much if you'd stop a minute at my office, unless you have an engagement. It's only a few blocks down."

She seemed uncertain whether to be suspicious or concerned.

"What do you think's the matter with me?"

"I'm not at all certain that my guess is right," he said, "but if you'll drop in for just a—"

"I haven't any money," she interrupted. "And I don't expect to have any."

"It isn't going to cost you anything, now or later," Dr. Marvin assured her. "You'll really be doing me a favor."

Her eyes had not left his face.

"I'm absolutely healthy," she declared. "I never felt better in my life. I could eat eighteen dollars' worth of food this minute. What's wrong with me?"

"You have some of the symptoms," Dr. Marvin announced, "of an overactive thyroid gland."

"Good heavens! Will I have to take treatments, and eat funny food, and—and—"

"Let's not cross that bridge until we get to it," Dr. Marvin advised. "Will you come to my office?"

"Just try keeping me away from your office!" the girl agreed.

"The next corner is ours," said Dr. Marvin, and pressed the little button set into the rail at his elbow.

His office at this hour was always deserted, for his secretary and his assistant never appeared before nine.

He let the girl into his consultation room. She seated herself in a chair near a window, clasped her hands in her lap, and looked up at him alertly.

Dr. Marvin seated himself beside her and casually possessed himself of her wrist. Her pulse was one hundred and two.

"Hold out your hands—straight out," he said.

She held out her hands. There was an almost imperceptible tremor at the finger tips.

He placed his fingers at her throat, and pressed lightly.

"Swallow," he said.

She gulped. The color had drained from her face. Frightened eyes followed Dr. Marvin as he crossed the room to his desk and returned with a blue card and a fountain pen.

"Do you mind answering some routine questions?" he asked. "I'd like to have you drop in from time to time. As I said before, it isn't going to cost you anything. Your name?"

"Suzanne Pringle."

"Age?"

"Twenty."

"Are you from the Middle West?"

"No, from Poughkeepsie, New York. Have—have I that disease?"

"It's very difficult to distinguish between what might be called a normally overactive thyroidism and an incipient case of Grave's disease."

"Grave's disease! Have I the symptoms of—that?"

"Well—"

"What are they?"

She was bending forward, her lower lip caught in her teeth, her body rigid.

"Tell me what they are!" she commanded him.

"Grave's disease, in its early stages," he reluctantly complied, "has these distinctive features. One is an abnormal luster in the eyes, another is a rapid pulse, another is an enlargement of the throat, caused by the swollen gland, another is a tremor in the fingers when the hands are outstretched, and still another, when found with the others, is any exhibition of high nervous energy."

Suzanne Pringle sank back and stared at him.

"Have I them all?"

"Apparently."

"Have I any others?"

"None that I have noticed."

"Yet you aren't sure that I have it?"

"Not positive."

"Is my pulse rapid?"

"Quite rapid."

"Mightn't it be rapid because you've scared me by all this?"

"That would have some effect."

"Mightn't it be entirely responsible?"

"Yes," Dr. Marvin replied, suddenly finding himself on the defensive, "it might."

"And my nervousness? Mightn't that have been caused by the way you stared and stared at me on the bus?"

"Well—" Dr. Marvin began.

"And my enlarged throat? Don't all women who sing a great deal develop large throats?"

"Do you sing?"

"Of course, I sing! It's my profession. And—and wouldn't crying make my eyes seem bright?"

"Had you been crying?"

"Of course, I'd been crying! You'd cry, too, if you were broke and couldn't get a job! And wouldn't my finger tips be apt to tremble if I hadn't had anything to eat since yesterday noon?"

"Good Lord!" groaned Dr. Marvin.

Suzanne Pringle came to her feet. All her color had returned in an angry wave.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, frightening me this way!" she cried. "I haven't got Grave's disease. There isn't a thing the matter with my thyroid glands. You looked right past the biggest symptom of all. The whole trouble with me is this! Just *this*!"

And she pointed a tapering white forefinger at her grotesque nose.

"It must have been broken early in your youth," said the diagnostician, expertly but faintly.

"I fell out of an apple tree. And any one, even a doctor," said Miss Pringle, cuttingly, "should be able to guess that my nose is the symptom that explains everything. Look at my nose! All my life it has stood between me and what I've wanted. I have a beautiful voice. I can dance as well as any woman on the stage, with the exception, perhaps, of one or two *première danseuses*. It's been my lifelong ambition to get into musical comedy, but the

managers just look at this nose, and if they're nasty, they grin or make some cruel remark, and if they're gentlemen, they give some excuse."

"That's hard!" said Dr. Marvin.

"It isn't even a comedy nose," the girl went on. "It's a disgraceful nose! Why! The only jobs I've been able to get have been in the radio broadcasting stations, where the audiences can't see my nose. And my greatest competitor has been a negro girl, and the audiences don't know she isn't white! And the radio broadcasting stations expect you to work for almost nothing. They say: 'Think of all the publicity you're getting!'"

"Bunk!" snorted Dr. Marvin.

"Sure! Plain bunk! What good can publicity do me? Can you picture me as the ingénue in a musical comedy with a nose like this? Be honest!"

"No, I can't," Dr. Marvin replied.

"Listen to my voice." And she sang a few words of some waltz that was vaguely familiar to him, her voice filling the small room until it seemed to ring.

"Beautiful!" Dr. Marvin applauded.

"Now look. Stand over in that corner, out of my way."

She lifted her skirts to her knees and began to sing again. And she danced. It was some kind of waltz; her body twisted and turned to the measure with a lively, willowy grace. Her legs were perfect.

His belief was unshaken. He was surer than ever that Suzanne Pringle was the victim of incipient Grave's disease.

"Do you see?" she cried. "I'd be a star to-day if it wasn't for this nose."

"Do you want that nose fixed?" he snapped suddenly.

"It would cost a fortune to have it fixed," she demurred.

"Sit down," he said rudely, and striding to his telephone he called a number. Presently Suzanne heard him say:

"Uncle Will? This is Allen. Will you do a nose job for me? Huh? Nope, you never heard of her. It's a girl who can sing and dance like a streak. She wants to go on the stage, but the managers won't take her because she has a nose—a nose—"

"Like Cyrano de Bergerac's," Suzanne prompted him.

"Like Cyrano de Bergerac's," Dr. Marvin repeated into the mouthpiece. "What? No, there's not a nickel in it. You won't? Aw, listen, Uncle Will! I'm tremendously

interested in this case. Want to keep her under observation for thyroid hypertrophy. I tell you, this girl— Huh? To-morrow at nine? Atta uncle! I'll send her right down to the hospital. It certainly is mighty—"

He looked blankly at Suzanne. "I guess he hung up on me. You're certainly in luck, Miss Pringle. He's one of the biggest operators in New York, and he's put you on the top of his to-morrow's list."

"Do you think he can really fix this nose?"

Dr. Marvin smiled. "Well, he's probably the biggest plastic surgeon in the East. He's one of the men who did such wonderful things with soldiers' faces during the war. He hates these ordinary cosmetic jobs. That's why he said 'no' in the first place."

Suzanne had sprung from her chair. She began to dance. She whirled. And as she danced she sang. She pirouetted around the room, and ended accurately with her arms about Dr. Marvin's neck, the sharp point of her terrible nose not an inch away from his.

Dr. Marvin was blushing from his shoulder blades upward as he disengaged her clasp, and made for the telephone to call a taxicab. Suzanne Pringle was one of the most absorbing cases that had ever come under his observation. Her fierce exuberance made his assurance doubly sure. How long would it be before this fire consumed her? Six months? A year?

II

At nine o'clock on the following morning, Suzanne Pringle was hardly more than a wrinkle in the long white sheet under which she lay, gazing up at the white and nicked ugliness of operating room No. 5. It was really an amphitheater, for Dr. Will Marvin's audiences had long since reached the size when they could no longer be accommodated on the floor.

The seats, rising steeply on three sides, were filled with men in long white gowns and masks. They resembled priests of some mystic and terrible order; and this was an exotic and terrible temple—a temple to the goddess of beauty, perhaps.

Dr. Allen Marvin and Dr. Will Marvin's assistant, likewise in snowy robes with white masks drawn over their faces, so that only their eyes could be seen, were standing one on either side of the table when the eminent

plastic surgeon entered. They had administered the local anæsthetic.

The stage was always set thus for Dr. Will Marvin. He frequently did not see the patient upon whom he would operate until the moment he entered the room; and the anæsthetic, regional or general, was always administered and doing its work when he stepped up to the table.

He came in smiling, nodding at nurses, and glancing up with twinkling eyes at the observers. Dr. Will Marvin wore no mask and no gloves. He was a short, broad-shouldered man, with shrewd, humorous eyes, and gray hair packed in kinky curls about his head.

The surgeon looked, not at Suzanne's nose, but at Suzanne's eyes, which met his unflinchingly. His eyes were a contradiction to his voice, which was crisp, humorous, and often cuttingly sarcastic. He lectured and answered questions with dry wit while he operated. His operating room stories were risque—and famous. But a patient, looking into his eyes, went into the chasm of terror with greater assurance of a safe return.

"Allen," said the surgeon, "do you really expect me to make a molehill out of this mountain?" He pinched the nose. "Feel that?"

"No," Suzanne answered, in a faint, far-away voice.

"That?"

Suzanne moved her head feebly.

"What kind of nose is it going to be? A simple little American nose?"

The students and visiting doctors behind the nicked railings were resting on their elbows, making themselves comfortable. It was a dull gray day, and the Mayo lights were on, flooding the group of white-clad figures on the floor with golden brilliance and unreality.

"Small and classic," suggested the assistant, casually.

"Irish," said Dr. Allen Marvin firmly, and crossed his rubber-gloved hands at the wrists. "Small and tiptilted."

A nurse was removing a tray of instruments from the sterilizer.

"There seems to be a difference of opinion," said the surgeon. "Has the patient any wishes in the matter?"

He bent over and placed his ear to Suzanne's lips.

"He knows best," she whispered.

"Who knows best?"

Suzanne's lips moved, but not even a whisper came from them. She was looking at Dr. Allen Marvin.

"Instruments, please," the surgeon commanded crisply; and in Suzanne's ear he whispered: "My dear, you're going to have the most beautiful Irish nose in the world; but you've got to promise to send me a pair of tickets to the very first show you're starred in."

Suzanne's smile of assent did not reach her lips; it was all in her eyes.

A doctor near the ceiling called down: "What kind of nose is it going to be, doctor, please?"

"I'm going to let you gentlemen guess when I have it finished," said the operator, and selected a villainous little knife from the instrument tray.

III

It was never a question in Dr. Allen Marvin's mind whether Suzanne Pringle would emerge from that operation with an alluring Irish nose. He had perfect faith in his uncle's ability.

The girl would be beautiful, once the nose was healed; but would she endure? Would the symptoms that had first attracted him be verified by others more pronounced? Would her exuberance carry her to success and maintain her there, or would it consume her?

Throughout her convalescence he made daily observations. He had seen many cases of hyperthyroidism; patients who had come to him for diagnosis, but he had never before had the opportunity to observe a suspected Grave's so closely.

He instructed the floor nurses to watch her carefully; to enter her pulse frequently on the chart, and to observe especially her nervous behavior.

After the customary three days of headaches and local pains, during which Suzanne was limp with suffering, she became a study in contradictions. One day a symptom would be present, and the next day it would be gone. One day there would be a tremor in her finger tips, and the next day her hand would be as steady as a marble statue's.

On one visit he would detect a suspicious pulsation in her thyroids when she swallowed, and on the next visit the suspicious pulsation would be absent. Only two symptoms—if they were symptoms—persisted day after day, the brilliance of her

eyes, and her pulse rate—and her pulse rate was baffling from the outset.

On the chart, her pulse was always about normal. But when he took her pulse, it was always from fifteen to twenty beats too rapid. He spoke to the floor nurses; accused them of carelessness. They protested and promised to be even more careful, but day after day the phenomenon persisted. The chart would record her pulse as seventy-four or seventy-five; his count would always be in the high nineties.

Then there was her nervous behavior. The nurses invariably reported that she had been quiet and tractable, generally humming softly to herself; but when he entered the room, she was neither quiet nor tractable; she was a bundle of restless energy. Her hands were not still a moment.

She would lie there, her beautiful brown eyes fixed upon his troubled gray ones, her hands flitting about, plucking at the sheets, fidgeting with each other, her legs kicking to and fro, while a torrent of chatter would pour from her lips. She told him all the hospital gossip, the story of her life, and the plans of her career.

She sang snatches of song to him. It was impossible for her not to sing, she said, when she was happy. And she gave thanks to him daily.

"Wait until you see your nose," he would say, perplexedly watching her eyes or her long, full throat.

"No matter how it comes out, it can't be as bad as before," Suzanne would answer, confidently.

He wanted to call in a gland man, but Suzanne firmly refused to be diagnosed by any other doctor.

"I've been finding out about Grave's disease," she announced one afternoon, "and if I have it, I'll burn out some day like a spark from a Roman candle. I'll bring honor and glory to you—and to no one else."

"It isn't a case of honor or glory," Dr. Marvin declared. "If something ought to be done, let's have it done."

"I'm too old for iodine," said Suzanne. "Your uncle told me so."

"Has my uncle been here?"

"He hasn't missed a day. He says I'm the most interesting case that ever came under his observation. He says my eyes bother him, too."

"H-m," said Dr. Marvin. "I didn't know my uncle was interested in glands."

Suzanne looked at him curiously, and said nothing.

The day finally came when the bandages and mask could be removed. Nearly every nurse and interne on duty on that floor crowded into the room for the ceremony, for every one was interested in Suzanne's nose and Suzanne's career.

She was dressed; had, in fact, been up and about for more than a week. She sat up stiffly in a chair while Dr. Allen Marvin removed the bandages and the cast.

A very pink, tender looking nose appeared. But it was a beautiful nose. It was an adorable nose, and as Irish as the city of Cork.

Dr. Marvin stared at her while Suzanne clutched the mirror the nurse held to her face. She saw a beautiful stranger. She now owned a nose that rivaled the loveliness of her mouth and eyes.

Her eyes became brighter and brighter as she realized what a charming nose had been given to her. Presently she pushed the mirror aside and stood up, her eyes so lustrous that they seemed twice as large and twice as brown.

Dr. Marvin, with the bandages and cast in one hand, was still staring at her. She reached up, grasped a handful of hair above each of his ears, pulled his head down, and kissed him.

Even in his blushing confusion, with nurses and fresh young internes all about him laughing, Dr. Marvin's brain was sternly occupied with its most recent discovery. He was sure—or almost sure—that he had seen a pulsatory vein in his patient's neck the moment before she had jumped up and kissed him.

Would her vitality carry her to success before the crash came? Poor child, he hoped so.

IV

SUZANNE was discharged from the hospital, and Dr. Marvin immediately lost touch with her. He did not, however, forget her. He often thought of her symptoms, and wondered if she were developing any new ones.

He was tremendously busy in the months that passed until they met again. His practice was increasing, and he was dreaming more and more of a clinic over which he would preside.

Several young doctors were intensely in-

terested in the plan. One was a pathological surgeon at the Rockefeller Institute, who wished to return to private practice; another was an eye, ear, nose, and throat man; the third, a blood specialist. They wanted a building of their own, beautifully equipped, and once each week they met for lunch in a little Italian restaurant where they ate spaghetti, drank illicit red wine, and discussed their dream.

They were all young, but tremendously ambitious, and rather poor. They estimated that the building and its equipment would cost close to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and their combined resources totaled only about fifty thousand dollars. Lack of funds was their only obstacle. If they could only raise three hundred thousand dollars more than they had!

It was after one of these impassioned luncheon conferences that Dr. Allen Marvin decided to sacrifice himself on the altar of his profession. He had conceived of the clinic as a marble temple to which suffering humanity would come and be cured of its ills, and the realization of that dream meant more to him than anything in life.

On a day when the dream seemed least possible of fulfillment, Mrs. Peggy Hoyle came to his office. Mrs. Hoyle was a blond and frivolous widow. There was nothing at all the matter with her, but she thought there was. She was not even neurotic. She was simply bored with life, and she was worth millions.

As Dr. Marvin was young and exceedingly ethical, he told her the truth. He told her she needed nothing but a little more sleep and, perhaps, an interest.

A few days later she telephoned to invite him to her luxurious Park Avenue apartment for dinner. Dr. Marvin went. A few days later she phoned him again, and asked him to come up to have tea with her. Again he went.

He was amused and appalled by her lavish ways. She discovered that he would soon have a birthday, and on his birthday morning a messenger brought to his office a platinum cigarette case monogrammed with diamonds—not the kind of cigarette case a struggling young doctor carries. He knew that he should not keep it, but in the end he did.

He accepted a dinner invitation from Mrs. Hoyle a few days later. And after dinner she intimated that she admired and respected him more than any man she had

ever known. Dr. Marvin, sipping Benedictine from her late husband's pre-war stock, became thoughtful. He became more and more thoughtful in the weeks that followed.

Peggy Hoyle was charming, vivacious, and rather good-looking. She had a beautiful, slender figure. As his wife she would be an undeniable asset, but he wondered if the pace she set would not be a bit too fast for a rising young diagnostician; if his ambitions would not be sunk in the wake of her ceaseless social activities.

His marriage to Peggy Hoyle would of course make his ambitious dream of the clinic an immediate reality. She knew all about the clinic, and had delicately hinted that the clinic, completely equipped, might take the form of a wedding present.

As he was an honest young man, he hated himself for taking such a cold, reasoning attitude toward a subject which he knew should be approached with hot impetuosity. Perhaps his training had made him too analytical; perhaps he could not love with a reckless and romantic disregard of consequences, as other men did. And perhaps he expected too much in a woman.

Peggy Hoyle would not permit him to talk to her seriously. Her mind would wander. First thing he knew, they would be talking about something frivolous. And she would look at him rather sleepily whenever he began to talk eagerly of his work or his plans.

"That new suit is terribly becoming, Allen," Peggy would say, or: "You should go in more for athletics, my dear; you have such marvelous shoulders."

She was constantly reminding him how tall and good-looking he was, and how distinctively he wore his clothes. He vaguely realized that they were a striking couple, but it hurt him when she would go into raptures over the necktie he was wearing and, a few minutes later, almost go to sleep when he related fascinating deductions he had made from a basal-metabolism experiment that day.

He supposed it was his own fault. He expected too much of a woman. But he continued to wonder. He had dreamed of an impetuous and romantic love affair with the girl he would some day marry, and his dreams were not coming true.

The fact remained that Peggy Hoyle was the fairy godmother who, by merely waving her magic fountain pen, could bring

his beloved clinic into being. And he abruptly decided, after more than six months of irresolution, to cast aside his illusions and to ask Peggy to marry him. If he was making a mistake, at least he was making a noble mistake, and his profession would be the gainer.

One afternoon, a few days after he had made the decision, a musical, lilting voice reached him on the telephone. He had been feeling very blue and low all day, and it was surprising how quickly he chirped up.

"It's Suzanne Pringle!" he exclaimed.

"You recognized my voice! You have not forgotten me!"

"No," he said, "but you seem to have forgotten me. You were going to keep in touch with me."

"I'm nothing but an ungrateful little beast," Suzanne admitted. "Honestly, doctor, I've been on the point of sitting down and writing you a long letter at least twenty times, but something always held me back. I didn't have any symptoms to write about, and I didn't think you were interested in anything else."

"How ridiculous! Where've you been?"

"Everywhere. From one end of the country to the other, and I've finally landed in New York. I'm opening to-night in 'Love and Kisses.'"

"You've made good!" cried Dr. Marvin.

"I've had the most amazing run of luck," Suzanne declared. "I started in the 'Love and Kisses' chorus, and they gave me a part in the Atlantic City try-out, and I ran away with one entire act. And I—well, they let me understudy the ingénue, and in New Haven she had a row with the director, quit him cold, and signed up for forty weeks in vaudeville. And I walked right in! I wish you could see the notices I got in Boston! Doesn't it sound like a fairy tale?"

"How does it feel?" Dr. Marvin asked.

"Do you mean, what are my symptoms? Well, my heart's going so fast you'd have to use an adding machine to count it. You'll have to see the others for yourself. I'm going to send you up a box for to-night's performance."

When Peggy Hoyle telephoned him a little later that afternoon, telling him she was having some people in for the evening, and wouldn't he drop around?—Dr. Marvin told her that he must see a patient who had just come to town after months of absence.

"It's a most interesting case," he said. "She had some of the symptoms of incipient Grave's disease, but some days they were present, and other days they weren't. It was the most baffling—"

"Well, if you can break away," Peggy Hoyle's impatient voice interrupted him, "I do wish you'd drop in later. Alice Hopkins will be here. She's the girl I told you about who broke the bank at Deauville, and she's simply a scream. It'll be a late party, and—"

"I'll try to make it," Dr. Marvin promised, without guile.

He then called up his three future colleagues, and invited them to have dinner with him, and to attend the opening of "Love and Kisses" afterward. At dinner he broke the news to them.

"I won't tell you where it's coming from," he said, "but I've found the money for that clinic. It will be a fact inside of one year. And we can begin to make definite plans."

After a moment of thrilled silence, the eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist announced in a husky voice:

"I'm going to buy a bottle of bootleg champagne."

"So am I," the pathological surgeon declared.

"And so am I," the blood specialist asserted.

Warmed and stimulated by champagne, the sacrifice he was about to make in the interest of his beloved science took on a somewhat noble aspect to Dr. Marvin. His career might be blighted by his marriage to Peggy Hoyle, but at least he was serving a great common good.

"What's this show we're going to see to-night?" the pathological surgeon inquired, idly.

"It's a musical thing," Dr. Marvin replied, and boasted, as any young man might do: "I know the leading lady."

"Ah!" remarked the eye, ear, nose, and throat man.

"Ah-ha!" observed the pathological surgeon.

Dr. Marvin blushed. He did not know why he blushed. It was surprising how confused and indignant he became.

"Look here," he said sternly, "I want you to know that the young lady is a patient of mine."

There were comments from his friends, of a cynical nature.

"What's her name?" Dr. Roy Veeder, the blood specialist, wanted to know.

"Suzanne Pringle."

"Stage name?"

"Nope; it's her real name."

"And," said Dr. Veeder, in a dry, admiring voice, "she's a patient of yours."

"I—I— She came to me seven or eight months ago with pronounced symptoms of incipient Grave's disease. I haven't seen her since. It will be interesting. Shall we start for the theater?"

Dr. Veeder was gazing at him curiously. He was wondering why Dr. Marvin should blush so. Dr. Marvin was wondering the same thing himself. Blushing at the mention of Suzanne Pringle's name in any connection other than a professional one, was a symptom that baffled him.

Another symptom made its appearance soon after the curtain arose upon the first act of "Love and Kisses." The palms of his hands were perspiring, and perspiration was prickling out on his forehead. These, he of course knew, were symptoms of nervousness. Why was he nervous?

Suzanne did not appear until the first act was half over. Chorus men and chorus girls, with arms extended toward a rosestrewn stairway, chanted the information that the girl who had never been kissed was about to appear.

Suzanne, in clinging white *crêpe de Chine*, appeared smilingly at the stairhead. Spotlights flooded her. The chorus stopped; the orchestra sighed into a slow waltz, and Suzanne began to sing.

Dr. Marvin became conscious of an ache in his palms, and discovered that he was digging into them with his finger nails. He found that he was sitting rigidly, and he tried to relax.

He stared at Suzanne. Somehow, he had always carried in his memory that older picture of Suzanne—the Suzanne he had first glimpsed on the top of the bus, the Suzanne with the *Cyrano de Bergerac* nose. He had really been unprepared for such radiant loveliness.

She was singing the chorus again:

"Oh, I've never been kissed as a girl should be kissed,
And I've never been missed as a girl should be missed—"

The theater suddenly was roaring with applause, and Suzanne was slowly crossing the stage, looking up at the box, smiling; and Dr. Marvin was gripping the railing.

Some one was prodding him between the shoulder blades. It was Dr. Veeder.

"Grave's disease!" that young man snorted.

Dr. Marvin found his cheeks shamefully ablaze again. He was angry. Why should this good-natured joshing make him angry?

Suzanne was taking her curtain calls. She was holding out her arms. Were her finger tips trembling? Were they?

The remainder of "Love and Kisses," as far as Dr. Marvin was concerned, was a confusion of bright lights, bright costumes, and meaningless chatter, with Suzanne's voice running through it all like a golden thread.

From time to time he realized that he was gripping the railing of the box and leaning outward, staring down at her, and when he caught himself in this undignified posture, he would settle back and try to relax.

It was as if Suzanne had suddenly set some forgotten chord to vibrating in him. He wanted to go back stage; wanted to make sure that all her old symptoms had vanished; but he would not subject himself to the ridicule that his three future colleagues would certainly have directed at him.

Did Suzanne or did not Suzanne have incipient Grave's disease? The question troubled him more than it ever had before.

V

DR. MARVIN did not sleep well that night. He should have dropped in at Peggy Hoyle's after the theater, but he was too nervous. His next meeting with Peggy Hoyle would be a tremendously important one. He was to take the step that every man knows is a serious step, and he must be calm.

All next day he could hardly force his mind down to his work. And when the curtain arose upon the first act of "Love and Kisses" that evening, he was sitting in the first row. Suzanne Pringle baffled him, you see; and he wanted to observe her—to observe her closely. His seat in the first row made close observation possible, of course.

Suzanne seemed surprised to see him, and she directed so much of her attention at him that many people in the audience stared at him. He lingered in front of the theater, after the show, for some time, trying to make up his mind whether it would

be advisable to go back to Suzanne's dressing room to question her.

When he had finally made up his mind to go back, Suzanne was gone. He had missed her by two or three minutes.

"Did she go alone or with some one?"

Dr. Marvin asked the stage doorkeeper. And he promptly wondered why he had asked that question. What difference did it make to him? She was gone; that was sufficient.

"Dr. Marvin," said the doorman.

"What?" snapped Dr. Marvin.

"I said she went with Dr. Marvin."

"But—but—" Dr. Marvin gasped. Then a number of chorus girls trooped out; he had to give way. And, having given way, he followed them to the street.

It suddenly became clear. Suzanne Pringle had gone to supper somewhere with his uncle. And he recalled now how unduly solicitous of Suzanne's progress his uncle had been after the operation.

Dr. Marvin returned home wearing a troubled frown. His uncle and Suzanne! How long, he wondered, had his uncle been seeing Suzanne?

When the curtain arose upon the third evening's performance of "Love and Kisses," Dr. Allen Marvin was again occupying a first row seat. Never before had a patient baffled him as did Suzanne Pringle. He wanted to make sure; he wished to make absolutely sure.

To-night he carried a stethoscope in his pocket. He would go back after the show to listen to her heart.

In the intermission between the second and third acts, he sent a note back stage to Suzanne:

Would like very much to see you a few minutes after the performance. Want to examine your heart.

The note was returned to him, and across the back was scribbled:

Her heart is perfectly sound. I have tested it.

And the note was signed "W. M." Will Marvin! So his uncle *was* checking up on her symptoms!

Strangely, he did not feel relieved. He did not feel in the least relieved. He wanted to test her heart for himself.

When Suzanne came on, her eyes were brighter than they had ever been before. She looked at him, and she looked quickly away. And after that, she did not look at him at all.

Dr. Marvin returned to his apartment with a strange feeling in his chest. He wondered if he were about to be ill. He had been feeling queerly the last few days. There was another influenza wave. Was he coming down with it?

He lighted his pipe and began to pace up and down before the fireplace in his living room. He felt strangely uneasy; he felt lonesome. And he decided he must have some one to talk to.

Peggy Hoyle flashed into his mind. He had not been near her since the opening of "Love and Kisses." Why not propose to her over the telephone? Why not get it over with?

He was lonesome. That was the whole trouble. He needed a wife. He needed Peggy. He would never feel lonesome with Peggy around.

He sat down at the telephone and removed the receiver from the hook. Presently Peggy's silvery voice was rippling down the wire to him. But he gathered that she was angry. Yes—she was very angry.

Why was he neglecting her so? Why had he ignored the message she had left at his office this morning, telling him to telephone her immediately?

It was a note he had never heard in Peggy's voice before, but it was a note with which—he knew—he was destined to become very familiar. A peeved Peggy—a thwarted Peggy—a pampered Peggy—

He listened to her in some amazement. She was ordering him around now as if he were a—a butcher's boy.

"But I have a consultation at St. Luke's to-morrow at three," he said.

"It doesn't make any difference. You must call for me at three. I told them positively you were bringing me."

"I'm sorry, Peggy."

"You're just stubborn!"

"But, good Lord, I arranged for this consultation. Two men are coming up from Johns Hopkins. It's a question of life or death for my patient. The man is virtually dying, and I'd move heaven and earth—"

"You don't move heaven and earth for me, do you?"

"Can't I see you to-morrow evening? I—I have something pretty important I—I'd like to say to you."

He knew now that he did not and never could love Peggy; but he would go through

with it. He would sacrifice himself to make his beloved clinic a reality.

He had given his promise to his future colleagues, and they were already making drastic plans because of it. He could not back down now.

He realized presently that he was addressing questions into a dead wire. Peggy Hoyle had hung up the receiver! No doubt she was furious. It gave him a further inkling of the life in store for him.

He had hardly replaced the receiver when the bell rang sharply. He supposed then that their connection had been broken; that Peggy was calling him back.

But it was not Peggy's tones that came over the wire.

"Hello," said a charming voice, "is this Dr. Marvin?"

"Yes," Dr. Marvin replied.

"Well, this is Suzanne Pringle; and I want to know why you've been sitting almost in the orchestra director's lap night after night, and staring at me until I'm almost frantic."

"The truth of the matter is," said Dr. Marvin, frankly, "that your case still perplexes me."

"Does it really? Have you discovered some new symptoms?"

"I'm not quite sure."

"Well, don't you think the surest way of being sure would be to consult the patient herself, instead of sitting yards away and trying to see through a half inch of make-up? Would you really like to diagnose me some more? I have a whole flock of the strangest new symptoms!"

"What are they?" Dr. Marvin demanded, keenly.

"I don't feel like discussing them over the phone, doctor. Hadn't you better see me—personally?"

"That would be much better," Dr. Marvin agreed. "When would it be convenient to you?"

"Right now," said Suzanne. "I'm just getting ready to have something to eat. Why don't you hop into a taxi and come right up?"

"I will," Dr. Marvin declared. "Where do you live?"

She gave him an address on Riverside Drive, and Dr. Marvin, stopping only to thrust a stethoscope into his coat pocket, seized his hat, crammed himself into an overcoat, and started for the door.

The phone jangled.

"Damn!" said Dr. Marvin.

Doubtless it was Peggy Hoyle. He lifted the receiver and briskly said "Hello." A man's agitated voice burst into his ear.

"Dr. Marvin? This is Samuel Shipley. Something's the matter with my wife. Will you come over instantly?"

"Yes," said Dr. Marvin, before the impulsive "No!" could reach his lips. He could not say no to Samuel Shipley. He was afraid of Samuel Shipley for more reasons than one.

Mr. Shipley was his banker, and he had the greatest respect for Mr. Shipley, not because Mr. Shipley could do him harm, but because Mr. Shipley was a monarch in a world of which Dr. Marvin knew virtually nothing. The world of finance; indeed, the entire world of business was a foreign world to Dr. Marvin.

Mr. Shipley was, in reality, an amiable gentleman; he was unfailingly cordial to Dr. Marvin. One time he had quickly and correctly diagnosed an attack of stomach trouble with which Mrs. Shipley had been afflicted. His promptness and accuracy had made a deep impression on the banker.

Since that time no doctor could prescribe a drop or a grain of medicine for that lady until Dr. Marvin had been consulted. They had been married for a good many years, and she had always been addicted to trifling afflictions which a backwoods G. P. could have diagnosed and prescribed for; but Dr. Marvin must always be consulted.

When he rang the bell of the Shipley apartment, he presumed that one of her old headaches had returned. But he changed his mind when Mr. Shipley opened the door. The banker's hair was rumpled as if by frantic fingers; he was white, and his face glistened with sweat.

"She's in that room, doctor," he said hoarsely. "I—I'm afraid it's serious this time. I—I'll wait outside. Please don't keep me in suspense any longer than you have to. She—she's all I have, you know."

Dr. Marvin went into Mrs. Shipley's bedroom, and heard the banker firmly close the door after him.

He emerged ten minutes later, and found the banker pacing the floor. Mr. Shipley stared at him glassily. He pressed both hands on a table, as if to brace himself against the impending shock.

"Well," he got out hoarsely, "what is it, doctor?"

Dr. Marvin was donning his overcoat.

"In the fewest possible words," he announced, "the trouble with Mrs. Shipley is—that you're going to become a father. That's all."

"No!" Mr. Shipley cried. "You don't mean it, doctor! After all these years—at last!"

He was gripping Dr. Marvin's shoulders, his eyes gleaming.

"If you knew how we'd dreamed—Sit down, lad. We're going to have a drink of Scotch."

"I can't, Mr. Shipley. I've another call to make."

"Oh, you're too businesslike, doctor. We ought to become better friends. You—you never talk to me. A man in my position can be mighty helpful to a rising young man like you. You—you ought to have a clinic of your own."

Dr. Marvin hesitated. He grinned. "I know it. I ought to have a clinic of my own. But a clinic, properly equipped, for myself and three associates, would cost about three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Where's it coming from?"

"Look here," said Mr. Shipley sternly, "are you joking?"

"I certainly am not!"

"Well, what's the matter with me?"

"You?"

"My bank. What do you suppose we're in business for? How much capital can you raise—cash?"

"Fifty thousand."

"Your associates all established men?"

"Well established."

"And it hadn't occurred to any of you to borrow enough from a bank to build and equip your clinic?"

"But we need three hundred thousand more than we have, Mr. Shipley!"

"My dear boy, my bank will lend it to you without any question. Drop in in the morning. Bring your associates. Bring me your passbooks or securities. I only want to see that fifty thousand as an evidence of your good faith. I'll put the facts before our loan board, and I'm positive there won't be any hitch. What's your rush? Hey!"

But Dr. Marvin was already speeding down the hall. It had suddenly occurred to him that he need not see Peggy Hoyle again, unless he wished, as long as he lived. He had fulfilled his promise to his future colleagues. And he wanted to fill his lungs with cold air.

And he was hungry. And Suzanne had said there would be something to eat.

VI

SUZANNE met him at her apartment door in a charming blue house dress.

"You're late," she accused him.

"I had another call to make. I'm sorry."

"Did you bring a stethoscope?"

He nodded.

"Well, you won't need it. I'm beyond the reach of any stethoscope."

Dr. Marvin was looking at her keenly. He looked at her eyes and at her throat. There were no suspicious symptoms.

"You look perfectly healthy," he said.

"You look wonderful."

They had gone on into her small living room. She, too, owned that utmost of New York luxuries—a real fireplace. Logs were blazing in it, and in front of the fireplace a small table had been placed. It was set with places for two. An electric percolator was bubbling. It was a charming, cozy scene.

"The coffee won't be ready for a few minutes," said Suzanne. "Let's sit down here and I'll tell you all about my new symptoms."

They sat down on a small davenport, and Dr. Marvin gravely considered her.

"How do you like my nose?" she demanded, gravely.

"It's a beautiful nose," he replied.

"It's going to earn a million dollars for me before I'm through, doctor."

"My uncle is a great surgeon."

"Priceless," Suzanne agreed. "I've seen him a lot lately. He's terribly interested in my career."

Dr. Marvin said nothing for a few moments. He was noticing changes in Suzanne. She had gained poise and assurance since he had seen her last.

And she had grown radiantly beautiful. That, of course, he had seen on the stage; but beauty on the stage and beauty off the stage are not quite the same, and Suzanne, he thought, was more beautiful off the stage than on.

"What are these new symptoms?" he asked finally.

Suzanne looked at him curiously. She sighed.

"Well," she said, "they began several days ago. If I remember rightly, they began on the night of the opening. I have

long dreamy spells. I can't seem to sleep as I used to. And—and I'm not eating enough to keep a bird alive. I—I'm afraid I'm going to starve if something isn't done about it."

"That's strange," Dr. Marvin remarked. "I've had very similar symptoms myself. It may be a mild attack of influenza. There's a new wave of it, you know."

"Oh," said Suzanne, "it can't be influenza. It mustn't be influenza. What else can it be?"

"Well," said Dr. Marvin, smiling at her, "the symptoms you've mentioned are very similar to the ones commonly supposed to be present when one is falling in love."

Suzanne's eyes shone. "I knew it! I've fallen in love! Who do you suppose the man can be?"

"My uncle," Dr. Marvin suggested promptly.

"Never," said Suzanne. "He's much too old. But let's get back to my symptoms later. I'm terribly interested in yours."

Dr. Marvin felt that unfamiliarly familiar heat wave creeping up his cheeks again. Blushing! What on earth was the matter with him?

"Oh, my symptoms—" he interrupted disparagingly.

"You must have fallen in love, too!"

His color changed from pink to scarlet, and from scarlet to magenta.

"Nonsense!" he gasped.

"You have!" she cried, and she was laughing. "That's the worst symptom of all. You're as red as a tomato. You're in love—and you didn't know it! I think that's wonderful. Doctor, who is she? Tell me who she is!"

He looked at Suzanne dazedly.

She said, accusingly: "You're in love with me! You've always been in love with me! I dare you to tell me I'm wrong!"

Dr. Marvin had become more and more confused. The poor fellow could only put out his arms, as if to ward off more blows of the same nature. His heart was banging away in his ears.

"See here—" he gulped.

"I'm here," said Suzanne. "And here is where I'm going to stay, forever, and ever, and ever."

She had simply slipped in between his arms. And his arms were locked about Suzanne.

He was breaking all the ethical rules and kissing his patient now. First he kissed her on the nose—the million dollar nose. Then he kissed her adequately.

She pushed him away gently. She looked at him rapturously.

"Darling," she said, "the coffee won't be fit to drink."

"Humph!" he snorted. "There's tons where it came from, but there's only one you!"

Perhaps that was the answer she wanted him to make. Perhaps any answer would have done as well. But, as if he had uttered the most impassioned and poetic words ever to fall as verbal gems from the lips of man, she came flying into his arms again.

Instinctively his hand slipped along her arm until it came to her wrist. Instinctively his fingers found her pulse. Instinctively he counted her pulse.

It was at least thirty beats above normal. That was quite to be expected under the circumstances.

There was nothing the matter with little Suzanne!

IN THE HARBOR: HAVANA

BEYOND the gleaming harbor bar
The sun sank in a golden mist;
Now in the sky's soft amethyst
Blossoms the first faint star.

Above the sea of darkling blue
A lone bird, silvered in dim light,
Wings shoreward—and the tropic night
Is starred with thoughts of you!

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

Caught With the Goods

WIVES MAY FROWN AND HUSBANDS MIGHT GRIN AT THIS
NOT UNCOMMON SITUATION, BUT BOTH GROUPS
CAN PROFIT FROM THE DISCUSSION

By Gordon Stiles

PHILIP MARSH was counted a lucky man when he married Celia Blake. He counted himself a lucky man. And why not? Celia came of an old and wealthy family; she was beautiful and accomplished.

Philip, although only thirty-eight, had made excellent progress in the law; his recently attained membership in one of New York's most substantial firms guaranteed him an income which stood for affluence. For three years before that, his annual earnings had been well beyond the twenty thousand dollar mark.

He and Celia had a six months' honeymoon abroad, and returned to live in a smart duplex apartment in the East Sixties. There, under Celia's inspired guidance, the domestic establishment moved smoothly onward—a perfect thing.

Celia was born to be mistress of a home. She loved the details of domestic life, from selecting the day's menu to the keeping of household accounts—which actually balanced at the end of the month.

Here again Philip recognized his good fortune. During his bachelor days he had been more or less a disciple of disorder, as scores of friends who had visited his living quarters could testify. His personal effects were normally scattered all over the place, and his laughing retort to mild criticism was: "If this place ever was put in real order, I'd never be able to find anything."

This theory was exploded promptly when Celia and he took up their lives together. If ever there was a household with a place for everything and everything in its place, it was theirs. That applied to Philip's belongings, too. And the young husband marveled at his former "sloppiness" when

he observed what wonderful twins Order and System really are.

"I do want our home to be pleasant, Phil," Celia told him. "It is such a delight to know that when breakfast is set for eight o'clock, it will be hot on the table at that precise minute; and that dinner at seven means just that. Doesn't it give you a thrill, dear, to see everything moving smoothly and without discord?"

Phil looked at the exquisitely appointed room, at the harmony of the furnishings. There was nothing that could possibly grate on one's nerves. And his lovely wife, meticulously turned out, was herself a creature of harmony. She fitted the picture perfectly. Phil kissed her, and laughed happily.

"Sweetheart," he said, "it's marvelous! *You're* marvelous! I don't deserve so much, but it's great to have it."

"Run along now and dress," she smilingly commanded; "dinner is in thirty-five minutes."

Phil went, bounding up the stairs in high spirits. Before marriage he had dressed for dinner only on rare occasions. But already he had grown accustomed to donning his dinner coat nightly. That had been Celia's idea.

II

AFTER two years of married life, Philip Marsh and his wife could point to a perfect score. There had been no clouds worth mentioning on the matrimonial horizon; Celia's management of the household had been flawless.

Repeatedly, Phil had gazed with admiration at Celia when friends were present, noting the ease with which she carried the

burden of hostess. Even when the party developed a certain amount of friskiness, there seemed to be no scars left—no mess to clear up.

The deftness with which Celia slipped ash trays into position well in advance of their possible use—and without the appearance of doing anything in particular—was an example of the manner in which she dealt with other problems of similar nature.

It was their third summer together that they decided to go on a camping trip for their holiday. Lee Dexter and his wife, Madge, who were keen for the outdoors, had urged a foursome in the Adirondacks where Lee owned a small camp. Celia saw at once that Phil was wild to go, and she immediately fell in with the plan. She never had been camping, and was not sure she would care for it, but at least it would be a new experience. So it was arranged.

The afternoon of the party's arrival in camp was so filled with confusion that Phil had no time to observe Celia's reaction to the surroundings. There were beds to be made and supper prepared. Lee believed in roughing it; and did not, as was more or less common in similar camps in the section, employ a man to do the hard work. As a matter of fact, if Phil had noticed, Celia strove more mightily than any of them to put things shipshape.

They ate canned beans and bacon that night, and drank coffee from tin cups. Afterward, all turned in to wash dishes. When that had been accomplished, and the four settled down to smoke and talk, Celia, whose eyes had been flitting about the living room, said: "Suppose I clean out the fireplace, Lee? It won't take long."

Lee glanced at the small pile of rubbish lying between the fire-dogs, and said easily: "Lord, no! We don't bother with that more than once a week in the summer. It's a handy place to throw all sorts of junk, and when we get a respectable pile we burn it and start over again."

"I see," said Celia. But frequently her eyes wandered back to the bits of paper, cardboard boxes, cigarette stubs, and matches, as if the sight fascinated her. The men were deep in plans for a fishing excursion on the morrow.

Celia was up at the crack of dawn, even before Phil was awake. When he opened his eyes, he spied her feverishly engaged in

tidying the room, struggling to arrange their belongings in neat and handy array. It was a tall order, owing to the smallness of their quarters and the lack of hooks, chests of drawers, and the like. Celia had insisted on bringing more personal luggage than Phil advised.

Now he said: "What in the world are you trying to do, Celia?"

"I just want to get this place straightened out," she replied. "But there's nothing to do anything with—no place to put things."

"You little silly! Just don't bother about them. You're in camp now."

Celia raised her eyebrows ever so slightly, and said: "Suppose I am! That doesn't prevent one from being decent, does it?"

Phil glanced at his watch, and hopped out of bed.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "I'd no idea of the time. We ought to get an early start. You and Madge can tidy up to your hearts' content while we're out."

He plunged into his clothing—flannel shirt, corduroy breeches, high-laced, thick-soled boots.

"I'll see if Lee has started breakfast," he said, and ducked through the door. When Celia emerged, ten minutes later, ham and potatoes were frying over the oil stove, fruit and cereal were on the table.

Lee knocked thunderously on the door of the room which Madge and he occupied. "Breakfast!" he shouted. "Eats, Madge!" And presently Madge joined them.

It was a noisy meal—a great contrast to the quiet, dainty morning repast at the Marsh home in New York. When Phil and Lee had satisfied their appetites they arose without ceremony and resumed the task of getting their tackle in readiness for the day's sport. Celia concealed her surprise at this, but, as the preparations neared completion, she remarked to Phil: "You haven't shaved yet, dear."

"Shaved!" The word burst from two masculine quarters at once. Phil continued: "I should say not! That's the joy of being out here. A chap can shave or not shave; if he does, it's when he likes."

Lee said: "We usually get to it once in three or four days, Celia. You'll get a kick out of seeing how downright tough your precious husband can be when he passes up the razor. You'll see him in his true light!"

Celia shuddered. After the men had

gone, she said to Madge: "Why is it that a man grows sloppy, naturally, the minute he gets away from the influence of civilization? Are they all like that, I wonder?"

"I don't know that I blame them for cutting out that beastly shaving when they get a chance. It must be a frightful bore," Madge replied.

Celia could think of many retorts, but she held her peace and bit her lip.

How Celia lived through the four weeks at camp, she never could have said. Twenty times a day her nerves were set jangling by incidents that were common enough to the conduct of any camping party, but which clashed violently with her inherent sense of order and neatness. And when the time came to break up, she felt as if she were on the verge of collapse. Probably she was; the restraint she had been forced to practice—even when alone with Phil—had subjected her to a terrific strain.

Thus, it would be superfluous to describe her relief when she and Phil found themselves back in their apartment.

III

So happy was Celia to be at home again that nothing else registered with her for weeks. Phil, of course, was quite busy bringing his work up to date, and spent many evenings at the office. Ordinarily, in such circumstances, time would have hung heavy with Celia, but now she was content to sit reading in her cozy library while her husband pored over briefs down town.

It was fully two months before Celia realized that Phil was taking a surprisingly long time to get "caught up," as he termed it. He still found it necessary to spend two or three evenings away from home, and Celia began to fret a little.

"Aren't you ever going to catch up?" she asked. And Phil said: "I don't know. There seems to be an awful lot to do." So it went on.

Then matters took a turn for the worse. Phil had to go out of town once or twice a month. He grumbled at the necessity, and always appeared tremendously glad to get home again, but that didn't help Celia to kill time during these absences.

It was while he was away on one of his trips that Celia's awakening began. At an afternoon bridge party, she mentioned casually that Phil had been away from

home more in two months than in all their married life before. This caused Mrs. Rex Cody, a cynical little woman, to remark: "Let's see, you've been married about three years, haven't you, Celia?"

"Just about," replied Celia.

"Uh-huh," resumed Mrs. Cody, laughing in a manner that caused Celia to burn with the desire to strangle the woman; "that's about the time they start in being 'busy' at the office, and taking trips out of town."

Celia was too reserved to go on with the topic, but, in spite of herself, Mrs. Cody's words set her thinking, wondering, paying more attention to Phil's evenings and days away from home. Even at that, she probably would not have become downright suspicious had it not been for her husband's manner when she said to him suddenly: "I do believe, Phil, you're getting tired of me and that's why you stay away so much."

To Celia's amazement, Phil turned red and stammered when he declared: "Why—er—Celia. What an absurd thing to say. How ridiculous!"

And the forced laugh that accompanied his words, coupled with the rank expression of guilt on his face, convinced her that—to say the least—Phil *was* out of the house more than he need be.

It was characteristic of Celia that she did not pursue the subject further; she was the sort who preferred to think matters over without committing herself. Which she set herself to do.

The idea of checking up on Phil was abhorrent to her. She reasoned, too, that to evince a sudden interest in the details of what he did would put him on his guard, if he were indeed engaged in any philandering enterprise; and if he was not, it was all right, anyhow.

Nevertheless, Celia worried.

IV

It is uncertain how long matters would have gone on as before, or what steps Celia eventually would have been driven to take. An incident occurred which gave her something definite to work on, and put an end to vague surmises.

In changing from one suit to another, Phil had left the papers from his coat pocket lying on his dresser. Ordinarily, Celia would have slipped the packet into a drawer, and thought nothing about it. However, on the top of the pile lay a sig-

nificant document. The name, Hoyt, Cable & Co., together with the figures \$185.00, caught her eye.

They had bought many articles from this firm, which dealt mostly in oriental merchandise, but she could not recall having made any purchase of that approximate amount for a long time. Curiosity prevailed, and Celia unfolded the bill. It read:

Philip Marsh, Esq.,

To HOYT, CABLE & Co., Dr.

One mandarin coat.....\$185.00

Celia stared at the bill unbelievably. The insinuation in Mrs. Cody's tones came back to her afresh. A giddy, sickening feeling took possession of her for a moment, then she regained control. Her analytical mind set itself to the task of dealing with a new and terrible situation.

First off, she went over every phase of their married life, and tried to recall anything which might be regarded as a failure on her part to play the game. She could not see wherein she had not lived up to her marriage vows. And having settled that point in her own mind, she went further afield in search of a possible cause for Phil's deflection.

At the end of a half hour, she was as far from a conclusion as ever. Her head ached, and she wanted to cry. She had tried to be a good wife to Phil; he had never complained, certainly. Why, then, should he seek the company of another woman—buy her mandarin coats, and everything?

For a moment she considered taking her troubles to Mrs. Cody, whose husband was notoriously engaged in outside affairs. But only for a moment. Celia set her lips firmly.

No other woman would know of her problem—yes, her *disgrace*! That's what it was—no less. If a woman could not hold her husband, it was because she had failed somewhere, somehow! She would work it out by herself.

Now she felt justified in checking up a bit. It was her duty to bring Phil to his senses, and to do that, she must proceed carefully. Thus, two nights later, when Phil had telephoned that he would be late, Celia called him up at nine o'clock.

He answered promptly: "Hello, dear. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing important. I just wondered how late you are going to be—if you

will be home in time to drop around to see the Wentworths. I'm quite bored to-night. Want to go out somewhere?"

"In that case," Phil said, "I'll come home at once."

They called on the Wentworths, and the evening would have been perfect had not Phil, after they reached home, carelessly flicked cigar ashes on the drawing-room rug. Celia had pounced upon the little gray smudge, swept it up.

Phil seemed a bit irritated, as he remarked: "Why worry over a little bit of ashes, Celia? Anna'll clean it up in the morning."

And Celia had felt hurt, somehow.

V

PHIL had gone to Washington for a three days' sojourn. On the second night Celia, beset by loneliness, put in a long distance call to the New Willard, where her husband was wont to stop when in the capital. To her surprise, the report came: "Mr. Marsh not registered at the New Willard!" Celia paced the floor most of the night.

When Phil returned next afternoon, she said: "Where did you stop in Washington, Phil?"

Something in her tone caused Phil to glance at her quickly. He replied: "At the Shoreham. Why?"

She said: "Oh, nothing. I just wondered." But in her heart she knew that Phil had lied to her!

The knowledge tore at her. She did not know what to do. If Phil really loved another woman, her manifest duty was to step aside and leave him free to be happy. If, on the other hand, it was merely a temporary infatuation, it was up to her to reclaim him, and to set his face once more in the right direction.

She made up her mind that she would not tolerate conditions such as obtained in the Cody family. Some sort of show-down must be compassed.

It was rather terrible, living with Phil, and not being able to believe him when he said he was going on a business trip, or that he must work late. She wondered how long her nerves would stand the strain. Not long. She must bring things to a head quickly.

If the Washington business had shocked Celia, how much more of a jolt she must have received through an incident which occurred on a November afternoon when

Phil was supposed to be in Boston. Celia had luncheon at a Fifth Avenue tea room, and was on her way uptown.

Her car was held up at Forty-Second Street while the crosstown traffic streamed past. As the signal changed and the car sprang forward, she saw Phil in a taxicab among the vehicles which passed her, going in the opposite direction. There was no mistake about it; it was Phil, sure enough. There was a touch of consolation in the fact that he was alone.

Consternation seized her. Here was further proof of Phil's perfidy. Also, here was something which he could not explain, she fancied. At home, she flew to the telephone to catch him.

Her voice was cold, although she meant it not to be, as she said: "That you, Phil? I just passed you on the Avenue. I thought you were in Boston."

"Yes," Phil explained easily; "I managed to get away this morning. Just got in. I was going to call you up, when you beat me to it."

"Oh!" said Celia, feeling that she had made a fool of herself. "You'll be home for dinner, then."

"You bet!" Phil agreed, and there was enthusiasm in his voice.

This occurrence left Celia more confused than ever. Not for a moment did she believe Phil's story. But how could she disprove it? So far, he had been perfectly plausible—too clever for her.

And, although her whole being rebelled against the idea, Celia resolved to set herself to watch her erring mate. Having reached this determination, she felt better, and was gayety itself when Phil arrived. It was paramount that she should not betray to him that she suspected anything reprehensible in her conduct.

VI

PERHAPS a week after the foregoing episode, Phil telephoned one afternoon the usual message: "I'm afraid I'll be somewhat late to-night."

Celia had said: "All right, dear." But excitement surged through her veins. She was set for action!

She set out in a taxicab. Better not let Foley, the chauffeur, suspect that she was trailing her husband. Shame suffused her at the bare thought of it. Nevertheless, she was beginning to understand the viewpoint of certain other women she had read about

in the papers, and at whose sleuthlike activities she had been accustomed to sneer.

She was a little uncertain just what she meant to do. It was half past eight; Phil would have had his dinner before this. She spoke to the driver. "Stop at the next drug store."

There, she called Phil's office. Her pretext was that she wanted a copy of a certain woman's magazine, which could not be obtained at the news stand near home. Would he bring one along?

Phil answered promptly. Of course, he would bring the magazine. Celia hung up, and pondered. Phil was in his office, right enough. What would it profit her to go down there as she had intended.

Then, in a flash it came to her. Phil, most likely, had fallen for the charms of his secretary, or some other woman connected with the firm. The commonest thing in the world! Why hadn't she thought of it before? She gave the driver Phil's business address in lower Broadway.

Celia shivered as she dismissed the cab. Lower Broadway is an eerie place at night, with its deserted streets and skyscrapers, and only here and there a light showing from one of the myriad windows. There were two entrances to the building which housed her husband's firm.

The one around the corner on a side street was nearer Phil's office, and that was the one he commonly used, she knew. She hurried through the cavernous gloom to the revolving doors, now quite still and looking worn and tired after the day's mad whirl.

Halfway between the door and the elevators, she stopped short. Evidently only one or two cars were in use at night, and before the grillework, waiting for one of these, stood a stunningly pretty girl. Every instinct within Celia cried out that this was the cause of all her troubles. Even now the interloper was going up to join Phil.

Celia's mind worked furiously. She would not go up now. She would take no chances of alarming the miscreants, prematurely. Stepping over to the directory of the building, Celia studied the names thereon. She kept one eye cocked at the indicator which showed the location of the descending car, and just as it came to a rest at the ground floor she turned and walked toward the street.

Her manner was that of one who has suddenly recalled something which had

slipped her mind. But before she reached the exit she heard the girl say: "Sixteen." That was Phil's floor.

Torn between rage and humiliation, and keyed to a high pitch of determination, Celia prowled the streets for ten minutes. Again she entered the building, and was carried to the sixteenth floor.

Alighting there, she hurried through the corridor to Phil's office, and stopped in dismay before the door. The place was totally dark!

For a moment Celia hesitated, swamped with emotion, then rapped loudly on the ground glass of the entrance. The knocks echoed up and down the halls, but there was no sign from within. Again she knocked, and again—with a like result! Finally she moved away, back to the elevator shaft.

What to do? Could she be wrong? Had Phil started for home, or was he—oh, that woman—she *knew* she had not been mistaken—a woman's instinct—

The elevator came and whisked her below, and once more she was in the street. She made her way toward City Hall Park. There she put in a call for Phil's office. Probably he would not answer. If he would not heed a knock on the door, it was unlikely that he would pay any attention to a telephone call.

To her utter surprise, his voice came over the wire at once. Celia was unprepared. She could think of nothing to say except: "I wish you'd come home, Phil."

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing. Only I want to see you. It's lonely here."

"All right. I'll come up in ten minutes or so."

Celia's composure left her flat. She knew that the time for the show-down had come. She would have it out with Phil. And now, she would hasten back to the office and waylay her husband as he emerged with her rival. He had said ten minutes; there would be plenty of time.

VII

JUST beside the entrance of the building Celia waited—five minutes—ten minutes. She was growing impatient, and even then she was not certain that she would confront the pair when they emerged. But she did wish they would hurry.

Footsteps approached along the side street, and Celia shrunk closer to the wall, studiously gazing toward Broadway. To

her horror, the steps slackened and stopped right at her elbow. Fright seized her, and she poised to flee.

Then Phil's voice said: "Well! Where on earth did you come from?"

Celia almost screamed: "Phil!"

"How did you manage to get 'way down here so soon?" he asked, and suddenly his voice went strange: "And why did you come?"

She turned on him. "Look here, Phil, this business has gone far enough!"

He was silent for a moment, and then he said: "I dare say I've made a fool of myself. But how did you find out about it?"

"Where did you come from just now," Celia demanded, "and *where is that woman?*"

"Woman!" cried Phil. "What woman?"

"The one you just admitted you'd made a fool of yourself about," Celia returned coldly.

Phil stared at his wife.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what you're driving at, but I may as well 'fess up. Come on with me, and I'll give you the whole yarn."

Wonderingly, Celia followed him back down the street. He paused before the door of a ramshackle building in the middle of the block, produced a key, and threw the door open.

"I'd better go first," he said, and led the way up two creaking flights of stairs. Here, in the dimly lighted hall, he fumbled at another door.

Celia found herself in a small suite furnished for housekeeping, a sitting room, bedroom, kitchen, and bath. The furniture was old and worn, but looked comfortable. There were a couple of leather easy chairs, a desk, a shelf containing a few books that had been much handled.

It was not, however, these that held the eye of the puzzled wife. It was the utter disorder of the place. The floor was strewn with ashes and spilled tobacco. Bits of last Sunday's newspaper lay here and there. Articles of clothing decorated chair backs, and the bed within was unmade. Across this lay a pair of Phil's pyjamas.

The desk was in quite as disreputable a condition. On an overflowing ash tray rested a rank black pipe, half smoked. Magazines were scattered about among pencils and bits of paper. In the kitchen was the evidence of a meal lately eaten—ham and

eggs, it had been, if the remains stood for anything.

Celia stood still in the midst of what she would have called "filth," and remarked: "You'd better get on with your explanation, Phil."

In a husky voice he began: "I don't suppose you'll forgive me, Celia, because I don't know how to explain. That is, I don't know if I can make you understand. But you see, dear—at home everything is so—well, perfect—I guess it's too perfect for a disorderly chap like me. I was beginning to get jumpy—or something. Anyway, it seemed as if I just had to be what you would call disreputable once in awhile."

"Oh!" Celia gasped.

"Perhaps you—I don't know if I can make it clear that I really was thinking of you. I was afraid that I'd break out some day without wanting to—and I knew it would hurt you. You see, I love you, Celia—"

She stopped him. "Do you mean to say

that you've been coming here to be untidy—nothing else?"

"I guess that's about it," he mumbled. "You see, I had an extension put on my office telephone, so if you called you would not worry about me. I could answer it here just as well."

Her eyes fell upon a large cardboard box inscribed, "Hoyt, Cable & Co." Phil followed her look. He stepped across and lifted it from its place in a dingy corner.

"I may as well give it to you now," he said. "I was saving it for your birthday next week. Hoyt called me up and said he had a beauty. You've been wanting one, you know."

But Celia swept aside the offering. Her arms went around Phil, and tears trembled in her eyes as she spoke into his coat:

"Oh, my dear! *My dear!* My poor foolish child!" She laughed shakily.

"Come on home, Phil," she whispered. "Come on home, and help me wreck the place!"

THE IDLER

LET me turn from my track
And so drowsily lie,
While forgetting the pack
And horizons afar,
To look up at the sky
And the drift of a star.

How soft lies the grass
That is beaded with dew:
Like a requiem mass
Fall the tones o' the wind,
As if sins had been few
And were all left behind

How sweet is the night
With the flowers that sleep:
How dreaming the light
From the tomb o' the moon,
While a frog grumbles deep
At the laugh of a loon.

Heigh-ho! The night's black:
I arise with a sigh,
And resuming my pack,
Seek horizons afar
That eternally lie
'Neath the drift of a star.

Olin Lyman

Cactus Billy's Vacation

AN AGED PHILOSOPHER MAKES A DISCOVERY THAT MANY A
YOUNG MAN WOULD DESCRIBE AS OLD STUFF

By Garret Smith

"**B**Y the Great Jumpin' Rattlesnake!
Another one!"

Uncle Cactus Billy looked up from the flushed and hissing horseshoe he was fitting to a hind hoof of Long Jake's irritable cow pony.

"Now, what do ye want, stranger?" he demanded.

He glared truculently at the genial looking young tourist behind the wheel of the car just halting in the desert trail, before old Billy's isolated little service station for man and beast and machine.

"Thought I'd like ten gallons of gas, and I'd let you shift tires for me if you aren't too busy to lend a hand for a minute," replied the stranger, mildly.

"Lend a hand—ungh!" The cow pony thought of a new dance step it desired to practice at this moment.

"Sufferin' scorpions," grunted Cactus, clinging doggedly to the upturned hoof. "Can't ye see I ain't got no hands to lend jest now? Besides, they's two other *hom-bres* ahead o' ye."

"Oh, I'll wait," the stranger agreed.

"Cactus ain't used to havin' a rush o' business thisaway," drawled Jake.

"Nope. Not at all," agreed Pete Deering, who was waiting to have a brake band put on his flivver. "Remember, Cactus, the week ye had five jobs hand runnin', an' was sick abed fer days after it?"

Pete winked broadly at the others to explain that he was joking.

"I rather thought from his sign he was open for any business at all times," the stranger commented, easing his feet out to the running board to stretch his legs, and wiping the alkali dust from his goggles. He had traveled fast and far.

He waved a hand at the hieroglyphics done in quavery lines of red paint on the

front of the apologetic looking rough board shop. It read:

William Cox

Alyus

Uncle Cactus Billy

jack of all traids and master of all of um—horse-shoin, auto repare, gasoleen, oil and other auto supplys, waggon-mending, eatin' supplies for man, woman and animals, harness and other outfits mended, and, etc.

*Only Service Station 50 miles each way
Anything broke I'll mend if it ain't
dead broke.*

*If you don't see what you want, shut up
and hike on.*

I do my own kickin'.

"You would kinda figger a man layin' himself open to all comers thataway would be glad to handle 'em when they did come," Pete agreed.

"Cactus warn't expectin' this to be no meetropylus when he set up shop here," Jake supplemented.

The stranger elevated his eyebrows slightly as he swept the horizon of snowy peaks rimming the wide empty bowl of the desert.

"I will say the congestion isn't so conspicuous yet," he observed, dryly.

"Wall, ye don't notice it much till ye git used to it like Cactus here," Pete allowed. "When he set up shop on the trail there warn't enough men in the county to fill all the offices. Now they's all of twenty a-dults infestin' the region permanent—let alone some one comin' over the auto trail like you every once in a while in rapid succession.

"Why, stranger, last election, now that wimmen folks has the vote, they nominated two hull party tickets, an' had one constitoent left over between 'em. That was Tom Lucy, foreman of the Hathaway ranch. Tom didn't dast go to the polls fer

fear whichever way he voted the other side 'd run him outa the county. So they had to draw cuts to see who was elected. Cactus here was plumb neutral. He ain't voted since the wimmen got the vote, bein' about the orneryist old bach' in the county."

"Why do they call him Cactus?" the stranger asked in a low aside.

"Stranger, jest take a squint at that there cactus plant over on the other side o' the trail, an' figger out what kind o' speech would come out o' its mouth if it had one. Then size up the features an' lineaments o' Uncle Billy there, an' listen in on the syntax that rips off the old coot's tongue, an' if ye don't say he is by all rights an' entitlements a human cactus plant, then I'm a horned toad."

The young stranger, following directions, was struck by the aptness of the metaphor. Cactus Billy's nose was a bulbous affair, not unlike some of the protuberances on the plant from which he was nicknamed. There was the same suggestion to his beligerent chin and his large, forward-looking ears. His spacious upper lip, his eyebrows, and his hair, bristled sparsely but emphatically. An observer might half believe that his grimy overalls and jumper concealed a body made of tough, green spiny fiber.

Only his eyes belied him. Even when his dynamic tongue was doing its worst, there was a whimsical humor in their blue depths that dulled the sting.

But if a cactus plant could talk!

As if to give further point to the comparison, a verbal volley at this moment exploded from Cactus Billy, as he set down the last hoof of the cow pony. He was gazing down the trail toward a distant approaching cloud of alkali dust.

"Hell's pop guns! Another one of them devil-made, Gehenna-bent, ripsnortin' stink wagons, driven by a glass-eyed son of a tarantula with a head full o' hot pea soup 'stid o' brains. Bet a busted flush ag'in' a million dollars he'll stop here an' want to buy some sin-curst contraption er git some teetotally curst thing er other done. Fer the sake o' the Great Gosh A'mighty, ain't they anybody in this hull misbegotten desert doin' any service work 'ceptin' jest me?"

The prediction was justified. Cactus was bent over the inwards of the flivver when a runabout dashed up and came suddenly to a grinding, squeaking stop.

"Hey! What d'ye mean stoppin' a good

car like that?" Cactus roared, looking up and brandishing his monkey wrench at the offending driver. "Want to rip the hell-blasted guts right out o' yer car. You poor—"

"Hey, Bill!" Jake whispered stagily. "Put on the choker. It's a lady!"

There were two ladies, as a matter of fact, both young and both impudently pretty.

Cactus subsided as suddenly as if a cow pony had kicked him in the solar plexus. He straightened up awkwardly, dropped his wrench into the bowels of the flivver, and limped toward the newcomers' car, even his rheumatic leg seemingly affected by his acute embarrassment.

"Excuse me, ma'am! Yes, ma'am! What can I do for ye, ma'am?" he stammered miserably.

"If you are quite through with your dithyrambic diatribe, you might fill my gas tank and then direct me to the Hathaway ranch," tartly suggested the young lady at the wheel.

"Yes, ma'am; certainly!"

Cactus complied at once, leaving his other customers waiting, in utter disregard of his rule of "First come, first served."

His action was not in the least prompted by chivalry, but purely by fear. For the one thing in the world before which Uncle Billy stood in awe was woman.

"We aims to please," murmured Jake, standing in mock attention behind the backs of the young women as they drove off with their demands satisfied.

"Go to the devil, ye slack-jawed young loco bird!" snarled Cactus. "Go on. Make dust. Your job's done. Leave me elbow room."

But Jake lingered on, with the bridle rein of his fretful pony over his arm, and gossiped with Pete, while Cactus finished work on the flivver and attended to the young tourist.

"Let's see, you told the ladies the right fork in the trail at the next water hole led to the Hathaway ranch, didn't you?" asked the stranger as he prepared to go on.

"Kerrect," assented Cactus.

"Some o' Hathaway's first boarders, I reckon," remarked Pete when this last stranger was out of earshot.

"Like enough," Cactus agreed. "I heard that ol' fool of a Jim Hathaway was turnin' his place into a dude ranch. That means the hull county overrun with young

pups from the East that ain't dry behind the ears yet. Be pesterin' me the hull dang time to mend their rattles an' dolls an' sich."

"Speakin' of the East, I hear Hatha-way's gal, Sally, is back from that boardin' school in Massachusetts, all grown up an' hifalutin', an' purty's a picture," Pete contributed to the gossip.

"Yeah. So I hear," said Jake. "I s'pose Charlie Powell an' her 'll be fixin' to git married now. They say he's got a good start on his new ranch."

"Ain't so sure about that," demurred Pete. "I heard Sally don't know no more about housekeepin' than a gopher. Spoiled by her ma. An' she says she won't marry anybody thet expects her to work. Her ol' man's set on her keepin' her word an' marryin' Charlie, an' there's a row goin' on there the hull endurin' time."

"I s'pose it was that fool gal o' Hath-away's set him up to dude ranchin' in the fust place," Cactus opined, settling comfortably with his pipe in his old chair where he could command a wide sweep of horizon. "That's the trouble with these fool women once ye give 'em rope. Keep a man in hot water. Think o' lettin' a woman fill this God's country with human titmice till ye can't take a full breath 'thout punchin' one in the nose with yer chest. Used to be so a man could set and kind o' digest hisself between jobs 'thout somebody gawpin' at him. Now, by cripes, he's got a row o' eyeballs 'round him day an' night. You boys mosey 'long now an' leave my eyesight clean fer a spell."

After the two cowboys had loped and rattled on their separate ways, Cactus continued to luxuriate in the blazing afternoon sun.

But idleness alone was not sufficient for his chafed spirit. He longed for solitude.

Ordinarily one would have said he had it. But Cactus Billy, casting his eye across the wide expanse of sun-baked alkali, sage and cactus, noted with increasing bitterness the faint blur of smoke from the new ranch house, itself invisible in the distance.

He turned his gaze again in the opposite direction to where a speck of white paint against the background of a black butte indicated another new settler. It mattered nothing to Cactus that they were thirty miles apart, and the only habitations in sight other than his own shack.

"Humph!" he exclaimed, dropping his

chair back on all fours. "This danged, pest-ridden county's gettin' overpopulated. I gotta git elbow room an' space to breathe fer a spell. I'm goin' on vacation."

II

HAVING thus impulsively decided on a break for privacy, Cactus acted with promptness. He would be away before any other customer arrived to bore and annoy him with importunate demands for service.

The sun was still some four hours high. Striking diagonally across an arm of the desert, he could reach the edge of scrub-covered foothills to the north by nightfall.

Limping into the storeroom back of his shop, he took out two heavy blankets, and in them packed an assortment of canned eatables, enough to last him a month when supplemented by the products of his shotgun and fishing rod.

Then he went to the water hole a few rods behind the shack to where a meditative, moth-eaten burro grazed on the sparse vegetation.

"Jehosaphat, ye lazy, dog-goned lum-mux, you been eatin' yer fool head off an' doin' nuthin' to pay fer it long enough. You an' me's goin' to change places. You're goin' to work fer a livin' while I rest an' vacate."

Jehosaphat eyed him reflectively, and, when Cactus came within range, wheeled and kicked at him solemnly with both feet.

Cactus was expecting this usual demonstration. Side-stepping with surprising suddenness, he brought a fist down stinging on the burro's flank, as the little unshod feet flew harmlessly past his head.

"Take that, ye consarned little flea bait!" Cactus admonished him, while Jehosaphat galloped madly to the end of his tether and brought up short on his knees with his nose in the dust.

This regular rigmarole complete, the burro suffered himself to be reeled in with the air of one saying: "Well, you know what I think of this foolishness anyhow."

Cactus strapped his pack to the mangy back of Jehosaphat, then took from the shop a can of red paint and brush.

A little while later he stepped back and surveyed with approval the following addition to the sign on his shop front:

Gone on vacation til further notis but liable to be back any minit. Help yourself to what you want an leave pay in tin can by the door. Air and water is free. All else at reglar rates.

Then, keeping a safe distance behind Jehosaphat's heels, they were off.

A surge of exultation swept through Cactus Billy as the shack fell behind him. He looked back down the trail just before a swell of land hid it from view. A motor car was approaching. Cactus shook a horny fist at it in derision.

"I hope, by Criminy, all four o' yer tires is full o' holes as danged sieves," he muttered, "an' ye sweat blood changin' 'em!"

He derisively waved his battered sombrero in the air.

"Whooee!" he shrilled. "Jehosaphat, we're free an' we're alone. You cussed ol' crow bait—thank Gawd ye can't talk. Any tongue clackin' that tickles my ears fer the next month is goin' to be done by me."

As they dropped down over the ridge that hid both the trail and the offensive ranch houses from sight, Cactus burst into song:

"I'm a son of a gun of a desert rat
An' I dines on alkali,
On red-hot stones an' gopher bones,
An' a hunk o' cactus pie."

His cracked tenor was interrupted by a basso bray from Jehosaphat.

"You said it, ol' flea blanket. My voice ain't what it used to be. You—"

But Cactus broke off suddenly as he noted the direction of the burro's gaze.

Far off over the plain to the left was a horse and a rider!

Cactus checked Jehosaphat sharply, and gazed mournfully at the unwelcome phenomenon. It was a mere speck in the distance, too far away for his old eyes to identify either horse or rider. The horseman appeared to be following a course roughly parallel to his own.

"Dod bust it!" old Billy exploded at last. "They have to come rompin' in on a feller, even here!"

He prodded Jehosaphat forward viciously for the next half hour. Finally a rise hid the stranger from view, and Cactus felt better again.

That night he slept in his blankets at the edge of the foothills among the sage and cactus. To-morrow he would strike a stream and a sprinkling of real woods. There would be lazy hunting and fishing, and luxurious solitude.

Cactus drowsed off, well content with the happy prospect.

But toward dawn, Jehosaphat, sleeping tethered near his master, twitched restless-

ly, then suddenly awoke with a snort, stumbled to his feet and brayed.

Cactus, instantly wide awake, kicked off his blankets and felt for his shotgun. And at that instant the distant whinny of a horse broke on the clear chill night air with a note of challenge.

For a long time the old man listened, but the sound was not repeated. Jehosaphat presently sighed and settled heavily to renewed repose. Cactus finally followed suit, but not to sleep.

"Was that some fool stray critter, er was it that cussed, meddlin', snoopin' *hom-bre* I seen off on the desert?" was the unanswered query that kept him awake until dawn.

Then he got up, ate a hasty breakfast, and strode on steadily until noon brought him to the wooded rise and the stream he sought.

That day he neither saw nor heard anything further of the intruder upon his solitude. At sunset, after a supper of trout, he sought the sleep of the untroubled in mind. He found it, dreamless and unbroken.

But when he started to prepare breakfast, he discovered that his camp had been invaded in the night. There had been one fried fish left from supper, and he had counted on it for breakfast. The fish and a half consumed can of condensed milk were gone.

Beside the flat stone on which those provisions had been, not three feet from where the head of Cactus had reposed in slumber, was the deep-heeled print of a riding boot. The print was distorted slightly, as if the maker had turned on his heel. Cactus could make no more of it than that it was not his own; he did not wear riding boots. Exhaustive search failed to reveal any other sign of the intruder.

"Wall, I'll be— The—" Cactus exploded into five minutes of lurid criticism of his departed caller.

He had intended to spend several days in this spot, but this episode caused an abrupt change in his plans. He packed Jehosaphat and marched twenty miles farther back into the hills that day.

Again he was convinced that he had found solitude. Nevertheless, he slept that night with a rope cunningly arranged to trip up any prowler, and to awaken himself. Moreover, he lay with one hand on his shotgun.

Cactus tossed in his blanket and cursed himself for being an old fool.

"Gittin' jumpy as a dash binged ol' woman!" he muttered. "Ain't a soul within thirty miles o' me. That feller was some tenderfoot from Hathaway's dude ranch, like enough. Got lost an' stumbled over me in the night. Go to sleep now, ye cussed ol' half-wit. Lie down an' shut up, Jehosaphat, ye danged, second-hand thrashin' machine, an' lemme sleep."

He closed his eyes firmly and forced himself to lie motionless. If sleep refused to be wooed he would capture the drowsy god by main strength. Five painful creeping minutes passed thus.

Then the uppermost ear of Cactus picked up the sound of a stealthy tread in the blackness back of him. He clutched his gun and sat up soundlessly, alertly ready for action.

After a moment of silence there was a sudden rush like the stirring of a night breeze. A pair of feet stumbled over his shins. There was a smothered cry, and the intruder fell sprawling full length across Cactus.

III

HE dropped his shotgun and clinched with the intruder. They rose to their feet locked in each other's embrace.

They swayed and struggled, and the stranger squirmed and fought with the nervous strength and fury of a wild cat. But the body in the bearlike arms of the sturdy old man was light and slender, and it suddenly collapsed and slipped to the ground.

Cactus caught at the collar of a khaki shirt and jerked his adversary upright again. Swiftly and deftly he ran a hand over the pockets and around the waist and shoulders of the trembling figure in search of weapons, but found none.

"Don't! Don't!" quavered a frightened treble voice. "I'm lost and hungry!"

Cactus set him down forcibly.

"Just a danged fool of a meddlin' boy, eh?" he grunted.

He struck a match and inspected his vanquished foe. The flickering light revealed dimly a slight, crouching figure in a riding suit such as usually affected by visitors from the East. The face was pale and worn, and unquestionably young and unhardened.

Cactus relented still further.

"Lost, eh? Hungry, eh? Why in hell didn't ye say so, an' not come sneakin' round in the dark?"

He started up his fire and put some coffee brewing, doing some annoyed thinking meanwhile. This was undoubtedly one of those Eastern dudes from the Hathaway ranch, but the code of the region forbade asking personal questions of a stranger.

Was this the fellow who stole his food, he wondered? Where was his horse? Probably threw him and ran away!

Cactus Billy's vacation bade fair to be seriously marred. What in Tunket was he going to do with the boy?

His guest made no further revelations that night, but after a ravenous supper, rolled up gratefully in one of Cactus's blankets and at once fell asleep.

But Cactus was not forgetful that this youth was at least a potential thief. He kept awake and on guard for the rest of the night, to the considerable detriment of his enforced spirit of hospitality.

"Gotta git rid o' the young cuss somehow in the mornin'," he kept telling himself. "Can't jest turn him loose to be lost again, though. Danged if I want to cart him clean over to Hathaway's."

Cactus had breakfast nearly ready when his guest stirred and sat up, drowsily rubbing sleep-heavy eyes. The old man turned from his fire, frying pan in hand, and glanced at the stranger. His heavy, bristling jaw dropped, and his eyes became two round blue pools reflecting amazed panic.

Sitting in the blanket roll, eyeing him with troubled inquiry, was a bobbed-haired young woman.

IV

THE girl was the first to speak.

"Why, it's Uncle Cactus Billy!" she exclaimed, relievedly.

"Why—why—ma'am!" he stammered. "I'll be— You kinda got the drop on me. I don't seem to know you."

"You wouldn't, Uncle Billy. They say you never look at a woman. But I've heard all about you. I saw you on the trail as I went by the other day. Perhaps, in view of our unconventional surroundings, I'd better not tell you my name."

She hesitated a moment.

"Still—why not? I'm—I'm Miss Terry, if that means anything to you."

"Umm—uh—" Cactus choked, shifting miserably from one foot to the other.

"No, ma'am! I reckon you're from Hathaway's dude ranch, Miss Terry?"

"I—I've been there," the girl admitted. "I was expecting a friend, and rode out to meet him. I cut across, but missed the trail and got lost. Finally I saw you. I didn't want you to see me, didn't know who you were, but I kept on your trail, thinking you'd lead me somewhere."

"An' me headed for solitude in the wilderness!" Uncle Billy remarked mentally.

"Then I got terribly hungry, so I sneaked into your camp and stole some food. I'm sorry. My horse threw me yesterday and ran away. I hurt my ankle when I fell. I—I'm glad you caught me. I couldn't stand it much longer."

Cactus was wondering if this was one of the two young women who had stopped in their car the last day he was at his service station.

"I—I'm sorry, ma'am, I was so rough with ye," he apologized. "Ye see I didn't know—uh—"

"Of course not. I don't blame you."

"Wall, now, ma'am, we gotta figger somehow on gettin' ye back to Hathaway's. That's a good forty miles. Reckon I can put ye on Jehosaphat's back."

The girl opened her eyes in wide alarm.

"Oh, no, no! I don't want to go back. I—well, I couldn't. I—I wouldn't dare go back. I'd about made up my mind before I was really lost that I wouldn't go back, anyhow."

But Cactus was looking very firm, although wretchedly embarrassed. A nice mess this was! Forty miles from nowhere—and alone with a helpless female!

Let this get out, and he would never hear the last of it! He saw himself a marked and ruined man, his proud, vitriolic dignity forever crushed; the laughing stock of the county and along all the desert highway.

He must get this girl back immediately. He would take her to within sight of the Hathaway ranch house and leave her. She didn't want to go back, eh! Bah! Women never meant what they said. He would show her. He cleared his throat to declare himself, but hesitated—and was lost.

Miss Terry had noted with growing fear that look of de-ermination. She promptly went over the top first.

"I won't go—I won't—I won't! You can't make me. If you take me back, I'll tell them you kidnaped me and were brutal to me. That would sound nice, wouldn't

it? You can't take me back unless you use force. Can you imagine yourself using force on a helpless injured woman, Uncle Cactus Billy Cox? Could you? Oh, dear! And all I wanted you to do was to take me over the hills to the railroad after I'm able to travel, and they're through looking for me. Oh, dear!"

Miss Terry was weeping now.

Cactus, thoroughly routed, became frantically busy with breakfast preparations, muttering to himself as he worked.

"Holy Moses in Jerusalem! What a mess! What 'n the crimpin' blazes am I goin' to do about it? Me mixed up with a woman at my age, after keepin' shet of 'em fer sixty years! Jumpin' Judas, what 'll I do about it?"

"Ooooh!" came a little cry of pain from the girl. "Uncle Billy, come here and help me. I've got to get this boot off. I guess my ankle's sprained."

She had slept in her boots, and had now thrown off the blanket, and sat nursing the injured foot on her other knee.

"Yes, ma'am," Cactus replied, and presented himself at awkward attention a safe half dozen feet from her.

She thrust out her foot at him, appealingly, frankly.

"Please get that boot off for me. My ankle swelled in the night and it's killing me. You'll have to cut it off, I guess—the boot, I mean. Then bandage the ankle, or something. You know what to do. You fix up horses when they're hurt."

Cactus stared helplessly at the dainty boot and scratched his bristling head. Chills of terror ran up and down his spine.

To be sure he knew what to do for sprains, and not merely in horse flesh. He had attended the damages of many a cowboy who had ridden unwisely and not too well.

But administering to the ills of a feminine limb, even if it was that of a young woman who might have been his granddaughter! That was different, vastly different! Cactus hadn't even so much as touched the hand of a woman since the death of his mother when he was fifteen.

"Please be quick, Uncle Billy," she pleaded.

"Yes, ma'am."

Icy sweat broke out on his brow as he opened the blade of his clasp knife and gingerly went at the boot.

Miss Terry giggled a little hysterically.

"Maybe if you really took hold of my foot you could work better, Uncle Billy," she suggested. "It won't break off."

Presently the boot was off. Miss Terry meantime had rolled down her stocking.

"Pull that off for me, too."

Cactus shivered, but obeyed, exposing a small foot, white and shapely except for an inflamed swelling at the ankle, which he decided wasn't serious, although undoubtedly painful.

While he heated water and delved in his first aid kit for bandages, Cactus was in the state of mind of the army that "swore fearfully in Flanders," but unlike those fearless troopers, he was, for once in his life, denied verbal expression. He began to suffer acutely from ingrowing spleen.

The surgical operation completed, Cactus returned to breakfast chores. Presently he set before his guest such a repast as fully satisfies the none too fastidious appetite of a desert rat.

Miss Terry displayed little enthusiasm over it, however. She picked up a slice of dry bread, tentatively.

"Would it be too much trouble, Uncle Billy, to make me some toast?" she asked, eying him bewitchingly. "I always have toast for breakfast."

"Yes, ma'am. I mean, no ma'am. I guess I can make ye some."

There followed another session over the fire. If the resulting toast didn't taste of sulphur, it was because Cactus was not even whispering the lurid language within him. He delivered the part-browned slice, and was halfway back to his own breakfast when he was halted again.

"Uncle Billy, I'm sorry, but my coffee's cold!"

Cactus reheated the coffee in a seething silence, and then managed to gulp down a little breakfast on his own account. Hurriedly he cleaned the simple dishes and grabbed up his fishing tackle, bent on getting away from the demands of this young tyrant, for a forenoon's solitary fishing.

"Oh, Uncle Billy, have you got a cigarette for me?"

He dropped his fishing tackle and viciously dug a bag of tobacco and a book of papers from his pocket. All the instincts of the true woman hater prompted him to hurl them at Miss Terry, but instead, after a tense moment of struggle, he walked meekly over and laid them in her lap.

"All I got is makin's," he mumbled.

"Oh, roll me one, I don't know how!" she pleaded, prettily.

He spoiled three papers in his agitation before he succeeded.

"You better do your own lickin'," he decided, holding it out to her.

She fumbled the job, and he had to make two more before one was lit properly.

"You aren't going far, are you?" she asked in alarm, as he started up again.

"You mustn't leave me alone. I'll be scared to death!"

"Gotta git some fish, ma'am," he declared, with his first show of rebellion.

"All right," she agreed, resignedly. "I suppose it 'll most kill me to step on this foot, but I'll hobble along with you."

"No! No! You mustn't!" Cactus protested, in a panic. This would simply mean more trouble for him. Besides, he would as soon not fish at all as not to fish alone. "I'll stay an' putter round here."

"I know what you can do. Have you got a needle and thread?" she asked, brightly.

She arose on her knees and took off her coat, turning one of the shoulders to the front and exposing a jagged tear.

"That's got to be mended," she decided.

Cactus took a needle and a spool of thread out of his kit, and handed them to her.

"Oh, I can't sew, Uncle Billy! I never even threaded a needle in my life. I'd make an awful mess of it. Mending things is your business, isn't it?"

Cactus couldn't trust his tongue even to frame a "Yes, ma'am!" this time. In silence, he took the garment from her, and retired to a safe distance.

"What did you say, Uncle Billy?" she called to him, sweetly, while he was getting his needle threaded.

"Nuthin'! Nuthin'!" he denied, hastily. "I was jest kinda hummin' to myself. Ain't it a nice mornin'?"

That was only the beginning of a highly imperfect day. Cactus put in twelve hours of such incessant service as he had never dreamed of in his little station on the desert trail.

Needless to say, he added several new trades to his boasted repertoire. By night he had qualified as a surgeon, trained nurse, chef extraordinary, bus boy, waiter, lady's tailor, special messenger, laundryman, and parlor entertainer.

At sunset, after a final bandaging of the

injured ankle, he retired with his blanket several rods distant. He had never been so dog tired in all his life.

"This is one holy hell of a vacation!" he grumbled to himself, as he rolled in.

"Uncle Billy!" came a wheedling voice out of the dark, just as he was dozing off. "Roll me another cigarette. I can't get to sleep."

But Cactus simulated a heavy snore, and made no reply.

V

THE next day was the same, only more so. Miss Terry went fishing with him. She accomplished this with the aid of a crutch suggested by her, and fashioned by Cactus out of a pine bough.

As day by day went by, Miss Terry's demands became even more insistent. Cactus rarely succeeded in getting out of her sight, and always looming before him was some unwelcome task.

On the tenth night of his slavery, Cactus sat and smoked in the outer darkness long after his guest was asleep. A third of the precious vacation he had allotted to himself was but a hollow mockery of the past. Somehow, he must bring this impossible situation to an end.

Yesterday, he had suggested timidly that the young lady was in shape to travel now, and that they had better trail across to the railroad. But she had turned moodily silent, and Cactus lacked the courage to press the matter. This girl was a mystery too deep for him.

Cactus had, through enforced familiarity, begun to lose a little of his timidity, but hadn't acquired the moral strength for rebellion. Besides, his sense of traditional hospitality still restrained him.

But, as he mulled over his wrongs, an idea began to develop. It grew as he nursed it until it mounted to a dazzlingly brilliant inspiration.

"By the Whoopin' Saint Criminy! That 'll do the trick!"

He slapped his rheumatic thigh so smartly in his glee that it gave a sharp twinge, but Cactus derived only further consolation therefrom. At dawn he was up, full of bristling purpose. Miss Terry still slept.

"It's my turn now, young woman, an' by cripes, I'm goin' to take it," he hurled mentally toward her sleeping form.

He hurriedly gathered together all his provisions in a compact pile, close to the

camp fireplace. Then he spread his blanket beside it where he could watch the recumbent girl a couple of rods away.

He lay and smoked nervously, screwing up his courage by a supreme effort of will. When at length he saw the girl stir, he hastily doused his cigarette, dropped back on his blanket, and began to moan feebly.

"Uncle Billy, what's the matter?"

Cactus replied with a deep groan.

Through half-shut lids he saw her jump up and come toward him, her pretty face grave with concern. He noted with satisfaction that she forgot to limp. He had suspected for the last two or three days that her disability had been assumed.

"What's the matter, Uncle Billy?" she asked, anxiously, bending over him. "Are you sick?"

"Yes, ma'am," Cactus grunted, feebly. "It's this cussed rheumatism got me again! Catches me like this every once in a while. Jest can't move nor do nothin' while she lasts."

"Oh dear! Oh dear! What *shall* I do? What—what do you do for it when it's like this?"

"I got a bottle o' linament somewhere in the pack," Cactus replied, a little shaken by the girl's sincere concern, but hanging grimly to his purpose. "Might git it out, an' rub some of it on that left hoof o' mine."

He saw the girl hesitate, and he chuckled inwardly at her evident distaste for the task. But she hunted up the linament, and then stood helplessly before him.

"What do I do now?" she asked.

"Have to git my boot off, an' fer Pete's sake, be keeful! It hurts like sin."

Miss Terry's performance as a nurse was fully as cumbersome as that of Cactus had been a week earlier, but she went through with it, and under his directions awkwardly applied a bandage to his ankle. Encouraged by this first victory, he took the next step a little more confidently.

"Now, ma'am, I'm goin' to trouble ye to git us some breakfast."

The girl's look of dismay nearly overcame the fixed expression of pain that Cactus was cultivating.

"Why—why, Uncle Billy, I'm sorry, but I never even made a cup of coffee in my life! My mother never let me do any housework."

"'Tain't so hard," he meanly encouraged her. "I'll tell yer what to git, and how to

fix it. Ain't never too late to learn—an' a little cooking won't hurt ye a mite."

The mess that Miss Terry made of that breakfast was a fearful and wonderful one. At her first attempt she burned the bacon to a coal. Cactus let her do it, and then made her fry a fresh batch. He took one sip of the coffee, and ruthlessly tossed the cupful out on the ground.

"Sorry, ma'am, but it would hurt both our stummicks to drink it bitter like that! Fix another lot, an' watch her close like I said, an' jest let her come to a boil."

At length the flushed and wearied girl brough this most unsatisfactory meal to a close. Relentlessly, Cactus made her go to the stream for more water, heat it, and thoroughly wash the dishes and cooking utensils. Probably never before in history had a desert rat been so meticulous.

"They draws flies when they're left dirty," he half apologized for his finicky directions. "Some say flies is awful unhealthy, ma'am."

"So I've heard," she agreed, listlessly.

"I got to ask ye to do another mean job," he went on. "We can't be too perticular, 'specially when there's sickness in camp. I gotta bundle o' dirty clothes in the pack there; I been so busy I ain't had a chance to touch 'em yet. You might jest take 'em over to the crick with that cake o' laundry soap, an' give 'em a good old-fashion' scrubbin'."

For an anxious moment he thought Miss Terry was going to rebel. But at length, without a word, she picked up the clothes and soap, and departed. While she was gone, Cactus lay and smoked luxuriously, thinking up new jobs for her.

All that day he basked in delicious idleness while the late star boarder acted as camp drudge, and waited on him continually. At noon he initiated her into the sacred mysteries of mixing batter and frying flapjacks.

She had to make several attempts before even Cactus was able to eat the result. She refused to touch them herself, and made a pathetic attempt to toast some bread for her own luncheon.

Twice in the night he routed her out of her blanket to rub his ankle. His rheumatic limb really did give Cactus considerable pain, but he had been long used to ignoring it for the most part. These gentle administrations were a new luxury, and a genuine relief.

The next day Cactus was still in a state of suffering. The girl, with a worried expression on her brow, went about her unfamiliar tasks so patiently that the old malingerer began to yield her a grudging admiration, and it was with some difficulty that he kept up his pose. But memory of his own week of servitude, and enjoyment of his idleness, and the novel sensation of having service rendered to him, kept him at it.

"Do the dern little fool good," he consoled himself. "How in Sam Hill can any woman be worth a cuss if she don't know nothin' about housekeepin'?"

By the third day he began to note an improvement in his slavey's technique. He thought he detected, too, that she was taking a certain interest in doing a good job.

"Uncle Billy," she said, suddenly, at the end of a period of silent abstraction, while they were eating supper that evening, "would you marry a man that insisted on your working for him like this all your life, running a big house, and everything?"

"Who, me?" Cactus exclaimed, startled. "I wouldn't marry the best man on earth, ma'am!"

"You know what I mean, Uncle Billy; I mean, if you were a girl. Suppose two men wanted to marry you, and one of them wanted you to work like this, and the other wanted you to live just the way you always had, and give you servants and things, and never let you do anything. Which would you do?"

"Wall," Cactus opined after some ruminating, "I don't reckon I'd feel good about havin' any man at all thinkin' I wasn't good fer nothin' on earth 'ceptin' jest to look pretty. An', if ye'll jest profit by what's happened to me, ma'am, you won't be countin' on always lookin' so dern handsome. Nowadays, I ain't findin' anybody hankerin' to support me jest on account o' my good looks."

"I hadn't thought of that, Uncle Billy," said the girl.

VI

Two weeks later Cactus sat, back to a boulder, complacently sunning himself and smoking a cigarette. It was about time for him to go back to his work, and gosh, how he dreaded it.

But this sort of thing couldn't go on any longer. He had been gradually allowing his rheumatic condition to subside to a

normal status. Miss Terry had noted it, and only yesterday had hinted that perhaps they would be able soon to proceed to the railroad and let her go on her way. Where she was going, and why, was still her secret.

At the moment the young woman was over at the stream, doing the laundry. Cactus wondered about her two lovers. Was she going to join one of them? Which one would it be?

"Wall, anyhow, she can't say I didn't learn her somethin'," he assured himself. "Now if she wants to go an' throw herself away, 'tain't my fault."

At that moment he was aroused from his reverie by a thunder of hoofs, and a cavalcade swept around the foot of the hill and up the slope toward him. They spied the old man at the same moment he recognized them.

The leader of the party was Jim Hathaway, proprietor of the dude ranch. Beside him rode young Charles Powell, who, common report had it, was experiencing rough going in his ambition to marry Sally, the Eastern-finished daughter of Hathaway.

The man riding at the other side of Hathaway was the young stranger for whom Cactus had changed the tire that last afternoon before he departed on his vacation; one of those tourists who had inquired the way to the Hathaway ranch. In the party, too, were long Jake Hollis, Pete Deering, Hathaway's foreman, Tom Lucy, and three or four other cowmen.

"Why, hello, Cactus!" Hathaway greeted him. "Thought that was your trail we stumbled onto. Don't suppose you've seen anything of my daughter, Sally, around here? She went away suddenly a month ago on her horse."

"Fer a vacation?" Uncle Billy asked, interestedly.

"No, we'd had a little row at home, and we figured she'd gone over to visit her aunt in the next county. She left the same day you did, in fact. Day before yesterday her horse came back, saddle still on, and showing signs of having been all over creation meantime. We figured Sally'd been hurt, perhaps, or lost. We just picked up her pony's trail a couple of miles back, and it led near here."

"Why, now, that's a dang funny thing, Jim," Cactus remarked. "I don't know yer daughter, o' course; ain't seen her since she was a little mite. But I did find a lost gal that said she'd been stoppin' at yer

ranch. Miss Terry is her name. She was hurt a little when she come into my camp, an' couldn't travel right away. She said she wasn't goin' back to yer ranch, an' made quite a fuss when I allowed I'd take her back. Said she'd go on over to the railroad. Then I was took down with my rheumatics, an' she stayed an' took care o' me. She's been doin' all my cookin' an' washin'—an' nursin' me to boot. She's a right smart gal. She's over at the stream yonder, doin' the wash."

"Miss Terry?" Hathaway said. "I don't know any Miss Terry stopping with us. Maybe she gave you a wrong name. But you say she's been cooking and washing? That doesn't sound like my Sally." "That certainly ain't Sally," Charley Powell agreed ruefully.

"I should hope not!" fervently added the young stranger from the East.

Cactus noticed that the two young men glared at each other hostilely.

"It certainly is Sally!" rang out a joyful young voice from among the cottonwoods at the rear of the party.

The group turned in an amazement which Cactus shared. There stood Sally herself, a wad of damp laundry under one arm. She smiled at them impishly.

The young Easterner was the first to recover from surprise. He leaped from his horse and rushed toward her.

"Why, Sally! Sally!" he exclaimed. "I've been nearly crazy for a month! What does it all mean?"

He held out his arms toward her, but the girl, still clutching the laundry under one arm, waved him back with the other.

"No, George!" she said firmly. "I am sorry, but I've made up my mind finally. You just wanted me to be an ornament, and some day I wouldn't be an ornament any longer, and then you wouldn't want me any more! I've been learning how to do things—and I like it."

At that, Charley Powell suddenly stirred in his saddle, as if he had been stung by a wasp. Then he, too, leaped to the ground. He walked slowly toward the fair laundress.

"Do you mean that, Sally?" he asked.

Sally, in answer, dropped the laundry, and rushed into his arms.

After the excitement had subsided a little, and she began to take a little notice of the rest of the group, Cactus sidled up to her.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said, with a re-

turn of his old diffidence. "But I want to get this straight. I didn't aim to represent no lady as tellin' what warn't exactly the truth when I told yer pa an' the rest that ye said ye was a Miss Terry. I reckon I must o' misunderstood ye, but ye been lettin' me call ye that right along."

"Why, yes, Uncle Billy," Sally Hathaway admitted serenely. "I did say I was a Miss Terry, but I didn't tell you how to spell it. It is M-y-s-t-e-r-y. See?"

"Ye mean, ma'am, it's a sort o' puzzle—

what ye call a pun?" he demanded, scratching his head.

"That's it," the girl admitted. "A very poor play on words, but it was the best I could think of at the time."

"M-y-s-t-e-r-y, eh!" he spelled the word to himself, later, as he sought the solitude shared only by Jehosaphat. "Wall, by the Great Jumpin' Rattlesnake, I sure was a hornswoggled half-wit. But I reckon that's the way all women spell their names, if the fool men only knew it!"

FINIS

THE days go by, but not a word you send—
Then, after all, it is the end—the End.
We that so often said
That other loves might die
And in oblivious dust be buried—
But never you and I
Could live without the other, but so long
As grass was green, and birds were filled with song,
Streams run and morning's dew
Glitters on flowers,
Never could come mischance betwixt us two.
Dear love of ours!

I am unhappy more for it than us,
That it should fail and fade and vanish thus,
So stable and so perfect as it seemed—
And now far off like something merely dreamed.
Gone! and your face,
Awhile ago so near,
Lost to me in the loneliness of space—
Can you believe it, dear?

To think that you somewhere,
This very hour, just as with me you were,
Laugh in the sun!
Belovèd, more I miss
Your laughter, all the fun
Of loving you than even the deep kiss
That made my heart so safe against your heart,
And said so proudly we could never part.
O love, is this
Truly the end, or may it only be
A brief eclipse,
A trial stern of the heart's constancy,
This lonely severance of our fated lips,
And exile vast of idle aching days,
Suns that without a purpose rise and set,
Flooding with empty brightness the old ways
We walked in, love, when love was with us yet,
Bringing again the golden summer on?
The stream sings for you, and May brings her flowers,
Busy with leafy secrecies of bowers—
Nature will not believe that we are gone!
Shall she remember, and can we forget?

Richard Leigh

The Abode of Fear

THERE IS NO EVIL IN THE MATERIAL WORLD TO EQUAL THE
DEVIL'S SPAWN IN THE SINFUL HEART OF AVARICE

By F. St. Mars

THE two shots, in quick succession, rang out with intolerable clamor and startling suddenness through the dank, lingering silence of the ancient wood. They awoke the echoes far and near among the somber hills, round which they ran like demon spirits hammering, and came back again. And a more than intolerable silence followed.

The guns looked at one another. One shrugged his shoulders. Another lifted his eyebrows. A third scowled, and said "Damn!" A fourth turned round, handed his gun to his loader, lit a cigarette, and sat down once more upon his shooting seat.

As far as they were concerned, that beat, the best beat of the day, the big beat of the season, was over before it had begun—over and done with without having been given a chance to start.

Then they all turned half left front and stared—all but two. One was big A. B. Finchdean, the host, who was on the extreme left of the line, and he looked as if he was in for an epileptic fit; and the other was Norman Stoughton, familiarly known as "Bored" Stoughton, or the Pussy Cat—neat, slim, sleepy-eyed, and lazy-seeming.

Stoughton was next to his host on the left, and was watching that gentleman with a tired regard that must have made the big Finchdean smile, if his mind had not been already so fully occupied elsewhere.

There was a noise of some one crashing blindly through cover. A face, so utterly white that it looked as if it had been born in darkness, appeared against the soft brown, gray, and blue plush of the woods, and a young man in shooting kit, but minus cap and gun, stumbled out onto the short, wet grass. He fell—fell right there, in front of them all, and he was gasping and repeating to himself, as a little child will

when it has been frightened in its sleep: "Oh! Oh!"

A terrible and prolonged stillness followed the end of the last word, and everybody looked at one another, and then at their host. After all, it was so purely his affair that no one quite liked to interfere.

The young fellow, prostrate there and shaking upon the grass, was Barnham Finchdean, *his* nephew, and *he* had sent him to the lonely corner by the old and ruined ironworks—Cromwell had forged his cannon there, for aught I know. The cunning old cock pheasants had an artful habit of running down to that corner, rising, and slipping away quietly, drawing half their relations after them.

But Barnham Finchdean was to act when the beaters were nearly through, the birds well forward, and the shooting already in progress, and not, as had happened, at the very start, when the beat had hardly commenced. The effect of that firing, almost in front of the birds right in the cover, would certainly turn them back, or sideways, or straight up, rather than forward toward the guns.

What was more, the young fellow knew that as well as any one else. Moreover, every one with half an eye could guess from his actions that that at which he fired might have been anything on earth, above, or under it, but it was certainly nothing as innocent as a cock pheasant.

Stoughton, save for one glance at the young man, had never taken his eyes off the big form of A. B. Finchdean. He was watching his host, cat fashion, and no man might tell what was in his mind.

As for A. B. Finchdean, he stood like a man bound and struggling desperately to be free, yet unable to move. It was a terrible thing to see—but only Stoughton, who

was nearest, did see it. It was inarticulate rage made manifest.

Stoughton drew in a long breath through his shut teeth—it was a way he had—and muttered: "What's the little game here, I wonder?" Then he lounged forward with an anything but discreet cough, calculated to recall even a dormouse to its senses.

A. B. Finchdean appeared to shake mentally from head to foot, and turned to him.

"Good Heavens, Stoughton, what d'you think is the matter with the boy, eh? Gone off his head? D.T.'s? Nerves? Drugs? What?" he shouted, as the two hurried in a converging line toward that huddle of motionless tweed upon the grass.

Stoughton shrugged his rather deceptive shoulders as he hurried.

"Goodness knows, and I hope we may in a minute," he answered, one calm eye on his host.

But it was awkward. A. B. Finchdean was not the man, and had not the reputation to handle a crisis of this kind as it should be handled.

"What the thunder is the meaning of this exhibition, Jack?" he roared, pulling up over his nephew, whose other name he had used. He lifted a huge foot, with more than a hint of unpardonable brutality, which, however, he thought better of.

Stoughton's right fist slipped back at the action as he arrived. Possibly his host saw it. Norman Stoughton was certainly watching him, but it was Barnham who spoke first.

"Oh, my God!" he wailed, his face buried in his hands, as if to shut out some horrible vision.

Stoughton bent down and lifted him.

"Steady, old man. Steady," he said, his words soothing as the purring of a kitten. "Pull yourself together. I'm here."

"I'm here!" What the—" A. B. Finchdean raised his clenched hand with a roar. "Since when— Confound—" He stopped, choking audibly, as Stoughton straightened quickly, and stood looking him insolently between the eyes.

For just as long as it takes a man to draw in a deep breath and exhale it again, they remained thus, man measuring man. Then, with a gulp, Finchdean dropped his eyes.

"I say, Stoughton, confound it! Jack must be beside himself over something. Fright. Practical joke. Beater on the thief. Never was a man with strong

nerves, you know. Awfully nervy chap, yes. Get him in out of it, shall we? Of course. Yes, yes. Eh—come along, Jack, old man. Don't worry. We'll see to it—eh—see to the ghost. Come along to the house. Never mind, my lad. Don't worry."

He put his hand under his nephew's arm as he spoke, and helped him up, and tried to lead him away. Barnham turned to Stoughton as he rose.

"You there, Mr. Stoughton?" he cried. "I'm glad. I can tell you. You won't scoff and laugh like—like the rest. Let me tell you. A patch of yellowish cloth, or something, in the bushes, going very quickly, and with great thumps on the ground, coming toward me, and an awful stink of blood in—"

He never got any further, though. Finchdean was upon him in a whirlwind of words, beneath which the young fellow's voice, not his strongest point at any time, was drowned and cut short, and he was drawn gently but firmly away, protesting weakly.

"I must apologize, Stoughton," A. B. Finchdean shouted back over his shoulder, "but the position is a painful one to me personally, since he is my nephew, and staying with me, you know, and—well, the other guns have taken the hint."

Stoughton turned meekly, and saw that the other men were moving off, recognizing in this an affair essentially private to Finchdean. Probably some of them thought that young Barnham had a fit of temporary insanity.

In any case, it was most certainly no affair of theirs. A. B. Finchdean had the reputation of being a "funny" man to deal with, and—well, every one knows what "funny" means. It has nothing to do with the humorous.

Norman Stoughton, however, was of a different type, perhaps partly because he had seen more. I cannot say. He certainly went away, it is true, but with moody reluctance, biting his trim mustache and frowning in tired perplexity—an amazing contrast of a man.

In the days that followed, Stoughton was oppressed with the memory of what he had seen at Finchdean's pheasant shoot; still more with what he had not seen. For there were two Norman Stoughtons: the one, a bored, decent sort of chap, more or less known in society in London and New York; the other, named "Joe Smith," an

elephant poacher of considerable success, and, for that reason, "wanted" by not less than three governments.

When Norman Stoughton turned up in society, in London or New York, the elephants of Africa ceased to be worried by Joe Smith. Moreover, he would collect not only ivory, but anything that would fetch a good price, from orchids to ospreys, and butterflies to native gods.

Now it happened that old Bilbury, the ivory merchant to whom Norman Stoughton sold his tusks, was in trouble about his exceedingly dark and handsome daughter Olga, who was engaged to young Jack Barnham Finchdean. Young Jack was very wealthy, more wealthy, even, than old Bilbury, and everything had gone very well until Barnham Finchdean's uncle and his son had come home from the back of beyond in the Malay Peninsula.

Since then young Barnham had been hard to hold, had got into the power of his uncle and cousin, had gone to live with them, and taken to strong drink—which they probably gave him, and generally played the fool. Old Bilbury, suspecting crooked play, since the uncle was young Barnham's sole heir, had confided in Stoughton, and commissioned that gentleman to help him—at a price, a high one.

Norman Stoughton was one of the most amiably idle persons that any one could meet, but he believed that "no flies enter a shut mouth." You may go through life with a worse maxim than that.

How he had contrived to be—within less than a week—invited to the pheasant shoot at Finchdean's place, Merlington Hall, he and Finchdean, who rented the Hall, alone know, and neither of them is likely to tell. There was a saying among Stoughton's friends that, allowed an hour from the Judgment Day, Norman would persuade the Archangel Gabriel to let him blow his trumpet, just to see what it was like.

He was that sort of man, you understand, and could worm himself into the confidence of any man in half an hour—and guess the rest. When you asked him how he did it, he swore he did nothing but remember his maxim, that is, keep his mouth shut and listen sympathetically.

Wonderful how men like to be listened to sympathetically. It is the key to their good opinion. Remember that, merry wives.

"Confound!" said Norman Stoughton

to himself, scratching his head. "I'll bet I don't get asked to Papa Finchdean's next shoot."

And he wasn't. All the same, though, he was there.

II

THE dew was not yet off the grass, and the mists were still steaming up from the streams and damp places, while the last of the Dawn Hymn was still being sung by the larks, the robins and the thrushes, when Stoughton, with his bicycle and his gun, the latter packed, the butt end in a fishing bag, the barrel in a fishing-rod case, emerged from the first down train, all alone, at Cedar Woodstock. It was the next station to Merling East, which was the nearest station for Merlington Hall.

Stoughton gulped in the magic freshness of the air, passed through the wicket gate, and rode off. He made no impression. It was his way, his business, if you like, to slip about unnoticed. Even the station man, with the inquisitiveness of his class toward strangers, scarcely noticed him.

Stoughton rode toward Merlington Hall, not by the main road, which was also the shortest and most direct, but by various and obscure side lanes, bridle paths, and, more than once, rights of way over fields. He seemed to know the way by heart, which he did: as if he were following strict instructions, which he was.

He had never traveled that route before, but a big tree here, a pond there, a gate somewhere else, seemed to give him his line as landmarks for which he had been told to look, and by which entirely he found his way.

The explanation of his knowledge was simple. Stoughton was not, of course, employed officially. Likewise, he never employed any one officially. He had "friends" unofficially.

They were not, perhaps, such friends as most men would choose. Most of them were tramps, gypsies, poachers, and the like, who had cause to be grateful to Stoughton for his little acts of kindness, rendered generally in cases of their desperate adversity. Such people get about more than most respectable folks have any idea of, especially at night.

Wherefore, when Stoughton required any information, or help, of the sort a man in his capacity would require, there were always to be found men—and women—ap-

pearing mysteriously out of the highways and byways, ready to give it to him.

A cowman behind his straggling herd, a shepherd striding by, and a little man with a lean dog, "just mooching," were the only persons he saw, but not the only living things.

He surprised the rabbits at their breakfast; the jays acorn hunting beneath the oaks; he came around corners upon cock pheasants, flashing their own glory against the new sun; he flushed blue clouds of whirring wood pigeons among the roots, discovered a stoat, rabbit catching; two moles fighting; a hare taking a constitutional on the king's highway, like any taxpayer, and once a fox, rolling insolently in the dust.

Then there suddenly came erect, almost under his wheel from the bramble tangle at side of the road, a grimy ruffian with a twinkling and roving eye. Stoughton slid a yard or two, hard braked, and got off.

"Good morning," he drawled, with that lazy smile that won him his strange way through life.

"Marnin', zir, an' w're be 'e a goin' tu, if I may make so bold?" replied the man of rags.

"Up along, out along, down along," chanted Stoughton, and held out his cigarette case.

Now this, you will conceive, was a very strange answer, and the question no less.

"Right-o, an' thanks." The man took not more than five cigarettes, lit one with the air of a connoisseur, and laughed. "Then, if you talks like that, you should be Mr. Stoughton, 'oo I've never met, but know'd—'ow long?"

Norman laughed.

"'Bout five years, I think. And you should be 'Pinky,'" he rejoined. "Well?"

"All clear a'ead, boss. All the keepers gone off 'urrying' no end t' the beats bright an' early, an' you ken go through's safe as down your own stairs."

"Good." Stoughton swung onto his bicycle, slipped a coin into Pinky's hand, and, with a "I rely upon you to cover my rear, mind," rode on.

Pinky looked at the coin, pocketed it, and stood staring after the bored one, dwindling in and out of the sun and shadow down the lane.

"That," he muttered, "is a mystery—not just merely a bloke, as the likes ov us, or th' ordinary gentry, but a bloomin'

knockout. 'E's a rare bird, 'e is. Don't put 'em up every day." And he vanished back into the brambles.

At last, by way of an old, old lane, where the buttressed hawthorns formed a twisted arch, where there was an ancient badger set gaping in one bank, and where the carpet of dead leaves was so thick that one could not tell whether grass or gravel or good road lay beneath, Stoughton neared the borders of Finchdean's preserves.

"I wonder," said he to himself, "how long it is since any one came this way?"

And straightway the tall figure of a man straightened up in the dimness; a lean, long-limbed dog ran out at him in dumb aggression, and—he was in the middle of a gypsy encampment. There was a quick signal; a soft word from some man on the ground, answered instantly in a strange tongue by Stoughton.

A woman bending over a pot—beside which were some telltale long feathers—looked up swiftly, her teeth and gold earrings flashing together. The dog, and two fresh canine companions, fell away "at heel," and—Stoughton vanished into the suspiciously sudden dense smoke of the fire.

Nobody saw him come out again. That was the strange part of it. As a matter of fact, nobody but the gypsies saw him go in, but you would have needed very sharp eyes to see him come out of—yes, the tent.

After ten minutes, one of the lean dogs, a lurcher, dashed through the hedge into the field at the far side of the lane from the encampment, and vanished down the ditch. Another duplicated the maneuver on the other side of the ditch up the lane. A third flashed across the field.

All three reached the pheasant covers of Merlington Hall, towering, still, and black, close at hand, ranged about a bit, and came back. The coast was clear. No one was watching. The dogs said so. If anybody had been there, watching or not, the dogs would not have come back.

There followed another pause of five long minutes, and then, through the hedge by the encampment, slid a particularly powerful, lean and leggy, brindled old lurcher of cunning eye and huge jaw. Crouching low, and going slow, he faded out up the ditch toward the wood, and almost in his tracks, silent as a cat, bending low also, gun in hand, and all but invisible in his carefully chosen green-gray tweeds, Stoughton, eye-

glass still in place, slid through the gap and evaporated on the dog's tracks.

He looked about the very last man in the world to be seen coming out of a gypsy encampment, but he knew, what very few people seem to have found out, that he who once befriends the gypsies is never forgotten by them, and has, by the same token, a safe pass among all the Roman people in the land.

Arrived at the point where ditch met wood, they found, motionless as a statue, and, therefore, nearly impossible to make out, one of the dogs standing alone. Stoughton gave the beast something to eat and a pat, waved his hand, and it vanished back to the camp.

Another wave, and the brindle disappeared into the wood, and in a minute returned. Stoughton moved on, sliding through the brushwood with an effortless, silent ease that very few white men could accomplish.

His quick, noiseless jungle tread seemed to avoid by instinct twigs that would snap, dead leaves that would rustle, boughs that would swish, and thorns that would delay. And the dog scouted to and fro, just within occasional view, ahead of him as he moved.

Stoughton knew that this beat of the Iron Pit Wood would not be the initial one. Others at a greater or less distance away were to be beaten first.

He relied then upon every keeper, every man on Papa Finchdean's estate, being at the other beats, since Finchdean was always short of both keepers and beaters. He would have Iron Pit Wood utterly to himself and the pheasants—and the terror—for a space.

It was trespassing, if you like; poaching, if you will; spying, if you really insist, but with Stoughton, as with nature herself, from whom he learned it, the end generally justified the means—pretty well any means not bereft of common sense.

He found his way by the compass for the most part—it was impossible to tell direction among the still, gloomy aisles otherwise—and his memory of which way Barnham had come from on the day he was at that unspeakable shoot. He also found his way by another means, a sort of instinct, habit, gift, trained guessing—call it what you will.

Then the undergrowth—not usually the strong point in a pheasant cover—shut in and engulfed him. Stoughton cursed it,

for it prevented him from seeing a yard in front.

He also cursed the dog, for it had vanished. Finally, he heard it come through the bushes like a hunted hare, to press close to heel, with tail between legs and every hair along its back a-bristle. He cursed it again for that he could not understand the reason. Then he did.

Very sudden was his jump backward, and far too loud the dog's yell at being trodden upon. Stoughton stood still, staring straight down beneath his feet at a desolate hollow of deep chocolate earth and shale, braided thinly, except at one spot, with weak and sickly bushes.

He stared also at a little dark stream, mumbling something you couldn't understand; at a high, very old stone bridge spanning the hollow, and, last, but not least, at a black, impenetrable mass of dwarf trees and bushes, falling away from where he stood to under the arch, one side of which it had nearly choked up. It was a lugubrious and weird place even in that light. Heaven knows what the moon would have made of it.

It was, however, only an old iron pit, wherein the Sussex iron masters of old smelted their cannon. The big, crumbling brick business under the arch in the smothered tangle was an ancient furnace, and the road over the bridge was the old road through the thin forest which they had made. It was now used once every few years for carting wood.

"Thanks," mused Stoughton. "This, if I am not mistaken, is the place where Barnham was sent to stop the old cocks. Enough to try any fellow's nerves, I should think."

He sniffed the air. Then he sniffed some more, and the more he sniffed, the more he frowned, and the more he frowned, the harder he stared down at the beastly black tangle that fell away almost sheer from his feet.

And the more he stared down, the more certain was he that a peculiar, horrible, unholy stink was coming up out of that tangle.

III

HE knew that unhallowed aroma. Some rich society man, of big game hunting propensities, once said that when out in the Congo State he had heard of an elephant poacher who was just like Stoughton; and Stoughton, who had laughed the insinua-

tion easily down, remembered that smell as connected with the Congo.

As for the dog, he made no bones about it. He was growling openly, and all his teeth were showing.

Stoughton backed away. Very slowly did he retreat, and feel his way backward for a couple of hundred yards, until he came to a place where the descent was less steep and quite open.

Then he stopped, and slipped two cartridges into what looked like his double-barreled, hammerless, twelve-bore shotgun, but the cartridges were solid drawn brass, and loaded with a pointed, copper-capped bullet. On the rib of the gun were three folding leaf sights, marked for one hundred, two hundred, and three hundred yards, and you will understand that leaf sights have no place on an ordinary shotgun.

It was, in fact, a modern shot and ball gun, a wonderful weapon, which will take a heavy bullet and slay almost anything. With the same weapon, by simply changing the cartridges, you could equally well shoot pheasants or rabbits in England, instead of elephants or rhinoceros in Africa. But, and this was more to the point in Stoughton's estimation, your weapon was all the time, apparently, nothing but an ordinary gun.

Making quite sure of the armament, he sat down, and, in a stream of shale and a little cloud of dust, slid incontinently to the bottom of the bank, where the iron ore lay, all washed and clean by the iron-tainted stream where the latter had come down in flood, and he stumbled over the remains of a long-forgotten industry at every stride. They must have been great men in their day, those iron masters of old Sussex.

Stoughton was very stealthy as he worked his way along to the bridge, now high above him, his gun ready, and his eyes and ears all round his head. Finally, he stood at the bottom of the bank, at the base of the infernal, dense, choked tangle of bushes, which cascaded down from the spot where he had so nearly taken a header from the bank above.

Against the bank, smothered and hidden in this thicket, was built some sort of a brick chamber, a ruined furnace, or kiln, the top of which, rearing up to the top of the arch span, was all that now showed through the growth.

Then Stoughton bent down and examined the ground, and "froze"—dumfounded.

There was a runway cutting into the thicket before him, low, dark, and well-trodden. But it was not the runway tunneled by any rabbit, or fox, or badger.

It was much larger than any runway that could have been made by any beast that one might legitimately expect to meet on the English countryside. The dog said so, growling, all teeth bared. Yet it was too low for any man to enter upright, or even double.

Then Stoughton did what seems to us a brave thing, but he would have told you that bravery is a matter of use, anyhow. He entered the tunnel, pushing his weapon cautiously in front of him, and muttering a smiling: "'Pon my word! I don't wonder," at the dog, who had frankly struck, and refused to budge an inch nearer the place.

It was none too light ahead, and the place was very smelly. The smell increased as he proceeded, a musty, pungent stench. Once Stoughton's hand slipped on something that was round and shone white—a bone. He set his teeth, and his deep-set eyes stared hard ahead.

There was dead silence there, except for the scrape of a branch, wind-blown, against the brick of the furnace place.

At last the view, which had until then been semi-illuminated by a stab of thin light filtering down, in and out, between the twisted roof of stems, stopped at the limit of bricks, and gave place to an inky, cavernous void—apparently the interior of the furnace itself.

It was difficult to see, very difficult, indeed, to be sure, but it seemed to Stoughton, straining his eyes to the utmost, that he could make out, just in one spot where the blackness was not quite so intense, the lower half of an iron bar or two, possibly the ruin of an old barred door or window.

Then he ceased thinking, and instantly jerked up his gun, as suddenly—so suddenly that he could hear the dog outside give a yap of pure fright—there came out of that cavernous, black chamber a single rasping, coughing grunt. No man who has once heard that sound could ever forget or mistake it—although there are, to my knowledge, two things in the world that can make it.

And Stoughton, apparently, had heard it before, a good many thousands of miles away from there, but he had not by any means forgotten it. It is the sort of sound

which comes back to you in bad dreams, and makes you jump awake, sweating. It is a horrible utterance, full of sinister menace and unspeakable cruelty.

That really was nothing. It was the eyes that counted, the eyes—floating, gleaming orbs of yellowish-green light, smoldering like coals—turned all at once full on Stoughton from the blackness.

Stoughton aimed as well as a man could aim in that unholy position, but he did not fire. In this, I think he showed sense. For that was no place for a mere man—who is always at great disadvantage on all fours—to court battle.

Moreover, Stoughton probably knew by then, or guessed, what was the owner of those eyes, and if so, that was another, and very good reason why he did not fire. He backed out instead, swiftly and without regard to the thorns against his clothing, cursing inaudibly and sweating freely, and the eyes coughed their nerve-shattering, rasping grunt after him.

Once outside, Stoughton did not wait. Perhaps he had no desire to remain close to that runway in the bushes, which was a reminder of what lay within. Perhaps the sudden burst of distant gun fire, which warned him that the shooting had already started, made him hurry.

Anyhow, he retired by the way he had come, and did not pause until he stood on the top of the bank, within the shelter of the trees, and then he mopped his forehead—and it was a cold day, too. But he said nothing. At least, he said nothing that can be set down here.

After that, he made his way to the bridge, crossed it, and, sitting down on the parapet at the far end, sought his hot drink bottle.

In a manner, he was in a strategic position; he had chosen it for that reason. Hidden by the trees growing up from the hollows below, he could see all round, and had a full view of the hollow and both its banks, the bridge, and its approaches, which were a grass-grown, rutted road through the woods, and that terrible thicket beneath.

Moreover, he commanded the whole scene with his gun, so that anything moving within three hundred yards was at his mercy. Nor could he be taken in rear—unless his enemy could fly up from the hollow beneath.

The distant firing continued, arose to a

wild tornado of reports, and died, with dropping, single shots, to silence.

"That's done," said Stoughton to himself, looking at his watch and the sun. "A sandwich or two and a drink, perhaps, as they walk. They won't be long now."

The sudden snap of a twig swung him round like lightning, gun ready.

About a hundred yards away from the bridge, on either bank of the iron hollow, the undergrowth thinned out rapidly, so that soon there was nothing left but the gaunt, ranked, gray tree-trunks and a solitary bush or bush-clump. One could see quite far into the wood there, but not near the bridge, where, as has been said, the undergrowth was so thick.

Stoughton's quick eye rested, even as it vanished, on the back of a man stooping among the gnarled tree-boles on the opposite bank of the gully, about two hundred yards away.

"Now who the devil," he mused, "can that be already? All the keepers should be at the last beat." And diving into his pocket, he clapped high-power binoculars to his eyes.

But the man, whoever he was, had evidently no wish at all to be seen, for he moved up along the hollow toward the bridge, stooping, and vanished again into the undergrowth for good.

"Oh! Oh!" Stoughton snapped the glass shut and into his pocket. "Fellow's determined not to be identified, anyway. Good tweed shooting suit and gun, and face hidden. No keeper, that. Knows his way, though. Might be a poacher if he was dressed worse. No guest, either. Queer!"

Stoughton took a last look at his gun, to see all was in order, then put away the remnants of his lunch, and, with finger on trigger, waited.

There was not long to wait. Sound carries far in covert, almost as far as over water, and soon he could hear the voices of beaters and keepers, passing outside the wood on their way up the hill, to commence the beat. Once he heard the sharp command of some one to a dog; once, far down hill, the cultured voice of one of the guns calling to a friend, and once the clean snap of closing gun barrels.

Then the sound came again, but this time so close at hand that the lurcher, lying beside Stoughton, growled warningly, and even Stoughton looked round sharply.

It was young Barnham Finchdean, com-

ing along a ride toward the bridge to take up the same position as he had occupied on the occasion of Stoughton's last visit to the place, when he had had such a fright. That alone was calculated to make one open one's eyes.

This was the last stand in all the world one would have expected him to return to, and considerable persuasion, probably not unmixed with taunts, and strong drink—his walk showed it—must have been necessary to get him there.

But why? Stoughton was asking himself the question, although, for his part, he had already half solved it. The other guns—if they were the same ones as last time, which was extremely improbable—may have asked themselves this, too. They probably found an answer in the explanation that he wished to vindicate his honor, or, in other words, to show that he was not afraid of silly hallucinations, which was what his dear uncle at the Hall had probably hinted.

Barnham Finchdean came on to the edge of the wood, and took up his position on a little piece of bare ground on the brink of the bank, and close to the edge of the bridge, the end where Stoughton stood. The latter, indeed, could see him quite plainly, flushed and rather above himself, not too steady, fingering his gun nervously, and staring about, not at the sky and tree tops, where cunning old cock pheasants might be expected to appear, but at the thickets which half circled him round.

From where he stood to the young man, Stoughton calculated, the distance was not more than forty or fifty yards, but he did not move to go to him, nor by word or sign or sight or sound did he reveal his presence. Stoughton stood very still, instead, a little bent forward, gun ready, lips and jaw set, with the air of one who expects a sudden happening, his bored aspect gone now.

Barnham Finchdean, too, had that air of anxious expectancy, for whatever fears the man may have laughed at in companionship, were calculated to come back doubly reinforced in this lonely place of a decayed past. He also stood motionless, his gun—swaying rather erratically—half up to shoulder, his eyes on the bushes, his mouth a little open, and—you could see it steam on the cold air—breathing quickly. It was plain that in these still, solemn, watching woods—woods always seem to be watching you, like the windows of empty

houses—his apprehensions were of something mysterious, or some mysterious thing.

Presently there came a pattering on the dead leaves within the woods. It drew nearer rapidly, and stopped. The head of an old cock pheasant was cautiously thrust out, and as quickly withdrawn, as Barnham Finchdean nervously threw up his gun, and dropped it again, while the pattering softly withdrew. A sparrow hawk took the hollow in one lightning streak, and a hare—of all creatures—the bridge in another.

IV

THEN Stoughton's quick ear heard the tapping of the beaters' sticks, still some way up the hill, and, in the same instant, a peculiar, long, low whistle, quite near.

He had only time to wonder whether that sound had been made by bird, or what, when the click of stones beneath the bridge distinctly came to him, and in the same instant the heavy, regular thump thump of some large animal, going at speed under the arch, and up the bank on the opposite side of the road. Stoughton knew he could not have seen it, even if he had raced across and shown himself, before it reached the cover of the undergrowth on that side.

That Barnham Finchdean had heard the whistle, at any rate, if not the rest, was evident. He was standing, looking everywhere, with his gun almost up to his shoulder. And the face that peered over it was the color of putty, except for the eyes, and they shone like the eyes of a drugged man.

"Gee!" Stoughton pondered. "That fellow is suffering some, but if I go out to him now I may spoil the show, and, besides, he's in a mood to fire at anything on sight, even me, if I appear suddenly."

The next instant, about forty yards to the right of Barnham Finchdean, the slight swaying of a bush, on the very edge of the wood, flashed to the watcher's eye. There was a nasty whining, hungry, snarling sound, and—before Stoughton could shout "Don't!"—Barnham Finchdean had swung round with a gasp, and fired both barrels of his shotgun straight at the spot.

Instantly a short, hoarse, coughing roar followed, a whirl of twigs and leaves, and the confused vision of a great yellow body moving from the spot where the shot struck, to the shooter—in one lightning, terrifying streak.

It was a full-grown African leopard, and a very big one at that.

Now it may seem, to those who have never attempted it, an easy thing to get in two aimed shots at as big a beast as a leopard, charging from forty yards. Try it. Try it on a lion, if you like, which is even bigger, always remembering that if you don't stop the beast, there will be a horrible mess—of your friend or yourself.

Barnham Finchdean had sufficient reason left to try it. He got as far as opening his gun, I think, in the time the animal took to cover half the distance. It seemed to him that there was no interval at all between the short roar of the charge, and the knowledge that the beast was upon him.

Indeed, the number of men in the world who can take lightning aim may probably be counted on the fingers of both hands, and one of them was standing there.

In that instant Stoughton fired, throwing up his gun and pulling trigger. The report of the powerful weapon in that still place was deafening, and the result curious.

The leopard came down in a clawing, snarling, tearing heap, rolling over and over with the impetus of its rush. Then it picked itself partly up, and tried to drag its body along to reach the enemy.

Its ears were flat, jaws open, eyes blazing red and gold flame, and the expression of unyielding, savage hate on the beast's face was so awful that Barnham Finchdean covered his eyes in horror. But the beast was helpless, with a broken spine, and a second shot from the big game hunter dropped it, where it raged impotent in its tracks. There came, after a few seconds of dreadful flurry, a sudden spasm, the big head dropped with a thump, the beautiful long tail lashed, and all was still.

Stoughton, however, was not looking at the leopard now. His eyes were fixed on the figure of a man in a tweed suit down the hollow, running away as hard as he could, and stooping where the underbush thinned out. It was he who had arrived by the same way shortly before.

Stoughton laughed, reloaded, and threw up his gun.

"Bang!"

A patch of white flared out on a tree about a yard in front of the man as he ran, and chips whizzed into his face, while the heavy, thudding report ran all through the woods and back.

The man halted, ducked, and set off again on another tack, dodging among the trees, and stooping low.

"Bang!" again.

A cloud of earth and dust and leaves flew up into the fugitive's face, and he stopped dead, rubbing his eyes, shaken by the realization that the man who had fired that shot could easily hit him. Then he stared at the big bullet hole in the ground almost at his feet, and stood up, facing round.

"Well?" he shouted back. "What d'you want, damn you?"

"Put down your rifle, or whatever it is, and come back here. I am dead on the middle of your chest!" Stoughton, invisible, called out as he reloaded again.

For answer the man dropped flat and fired, but the shot went wide, because a shower of chips and twigs fell onto his face from barely a yard overhead and spoiled his aim, and the thunder of Stoughton's gun followed.

Then the man arose and sulkily advanced toward him.

"Down the middle of the gully, please, in the open, where I can see you," came Stoughton's soothing voice, and he heard Barnham Finchdean gasp behind him, but he did not look round. He covered the advancing figure with an automatic pistol as being the safer move.

Barnham Finchdean could not see the man, because he was on the other side of the bush which sheltered Stoughton. He was too shaken to think, or say, or do much just then.

It was not until Stoughton had, with the automatic, carefully shepherded the prisoner to within a few yards of the beautiful spotted form of the dead beast, that the young fellow recognized the captive.

"Good God!" gasped Barnham Finchdean. "It's James!"

Stoughton never removed his sleepy eyes off his prisoner, but went through that person's pockets swiftly, and took from him a revolver.

"Exactly! Your cousin?" he asked calmly.

"My cousin, of course, Uncle Finchdean's son."

"Ah! Now I see—most entirely do I see!"

"You're very funny," cut in James, an unprepossessing young man, with the head and neck and build of a hooligan. "But perhaps you'll quit this fooling and tell me what you think you are going to do."

"Do?" said Stoughton, gently surprised. "Do? I propose to charge you, and your

dear kind papa, with the attempted murder of your cousin here, unless, that is—unless—”

“Murder? I? Good Heavens, man, you’re mad! You’ve no proof. You—” He broke off, spluttering and speechless.

“Pardon me.” Stoughton’s resigned look was as calming as possible. “I fancy that spotted gentleman on the grass there will be rather substantial proof. A beautiful beast, and very hungry. I know where you kept him, and I saw you come to let him out, but I’m still a little in the dark as to how you taught him to go straight to”—he nodded toward Barnham Finchdean, who had turned a fine green—“his prey, shall we say?”

The fellow’s face had become livid as Stoughton spoke, his jaw dropped, and his eyes took on the furtive glare of a beast—a hunted one. He was dumb.

Barnham Finchdean began to gulp in his throat like a frightened child.

The lurcher came back from worrying the dead leopard, and sat down with bared teeth exactly in front of James.

“G-r-r-r!” he said, and the son of A. B. Finchdean looked down. That dog seemed to settle him.

“‘Unless,’ you were saying just now. Unless what?” he muttered.

“Unless you tell me your story, and you and your precious father leave the country within twenty-four hours, and give an undertaking that you will never return,” was the quiet reply.

The dark barrel of the automatic was very near and wicked-looking, and the finger on the trigger was firm.

“G-r-r-r-r!” said the lurcher again, as James moved nervously.

V

“ALL right,” he said, throwing his hands to his side. “I may as well, I suppose. I’ll answer for the old man, but can I take your word we won’t be arrested?” He paused and stared hard at his captor.

Stoughton shrugged his shoulders.

“Right.” James Finchdean paused and looked round. “Will any one know what I am going to say?”

“Nobody.”

“Or my father?”

“Nor your father. You will simply be free to quit.”

“Good. And if I don’t speak?”

Stoughton laughed.

“You’ll face your trial,” he drawled quietly.

The man started.

“Good God!” he spluttered. “But men aren’t as hard as that.”

“Most of ’em aren’t. I’m one of those that are,” and there was a look in Stoughton’s eyes that made James blink.

“All right. I’ll speak. The old man and I were hard up, on the verge of going smash. As you know, if Barnham here dies without an heir, the old man comes into his fortune. We planned that he should die. The old man invited him here. He made it his home. We only have this place on lease, and we haven’t paid for it yet, and won’t, now. Caracal, the menagerie proprietor, rented it before us. That was why we took it.”

“H-m, well, why this leopard?”

“To deaden suspicion, of course, and give us time. We knew some people about Merling East, and learned from them that old Caracal used to keep some of his beasts about the place in traveling cages. One or two of these escaped, being recaptured, of course. I suppose menagerie people are used to this sort of thing, but the villagers weren’t. All sorts of tales went about, and one was that a leopard which got out into the woods, was never recaptured.”

“Very nice, my murderous friend!” Stoughton remarked, mentally.

“As a matter of fact, I believe Caracal shot it himself, but you know what these folks are. You can’t get a thing out of their heads once it’s in; and some of ’em believe that leopard is alive to this day. It was this tale that we banked on when the notion first struck us about Barnham here. If it hadn’t been for you, it would have come off, and it wouldn’t have been our fault if Barnham had been killed by an escaped leopard left by a previous tenant, would it?”

“True!” Stoughton agreed, softly.

“Our plan was this: after we’d found the right spot we told the keepers I’d work this beat myself, alone, because I liked it as a hobby, then we set to work and made a cage of the old furnace below there. It is well hidden, and you can open it by standing on top of the bank and pulling up the bars, in safety, from above. Next we got our leopard.”

Barnham Finchdean gasped, but said nothing.

“This one here wasn’t the first, though.

One escaped in the process of training, and kept up the tale about old Caracal's roaming beast nicely, for he was seen—and had to be poisoned secretly. One tried to charge us up the bank from below, and had to be shot as it fell back, and this one we kept. Our plan was to place half his meat every day a little farther off, until he got accustomed to go and fetch it from the very spot where we arranged Barnham should stand when pheasant shooting. He is immensely fond of pheasant shooting, by the way."

The intended victim winced in silence.

"And while the leopard was off after that, we put the other and bigger half of his meat in the cage. That way he got to know that unless he hurried up and grabbed the smaller half, where Barnham was to stand, and get back to the cage quickly, he lost his meal. He got awfully tame, and used to race over the gully, grab his joint at my whistle, and dash back to the cage for his big course in no time."

"Good work!" Stoughton murmured, gently.

"We counted, of course, upon Barnham firing at him in panic, and wounding him, and, as everybody knows, a wounded leopard always charges instantly. Unfortunately for us, Barnham missed the first time, and fled, and only scared the brute. And—well, you know what happened the second time. The fool hit him, and he charged. What's more, he'd have driven his charge home if it hadn't been for you. There, now. That's all!"

He paused, staring hard over Stoughton's head, before he added suddenly:

"And, of course, I shouldn't have told you that if I'd meant you ever to get away alive. Put your hands up and look behind you, you clever fool!"

VI

STOUGHTON did nothing of the kind. He had no desire to take his eyes off the man, who, by his own confession, was as good as a murderer.

He told Barnham Finchdean to look, instead, and the latter let his gun fall, and threw up his hands.

"It's Uncle Finchdean, with a revolver pointed straight at you!" he spluttered.

Stoughton said nothing. For a normally lazy and bored man, he was singularly quick in that moment. Barnham Finchdean's last word, and the clean smack of

Stoughton's right fist on the point of James's chin, were coincident.

James dropped as if he had been pole-axed, but he was not down before Stoughton's lean form had hurdled him, and was going down the slope, for all the world like a rabbit fresh caught in a snare.

A. B. Finchdean shot between the hops, so to speak. The unexpectedness of the action had upset his calculations, but only for an instant.

At the third shot Stoughton gave a horrible scream, pitched forward in a collapsed heap, and rolled clean over twice from his own impetus as he fell. And then he lay, a huddled heap from which the life had been wrenched in a second.

"That's fine!" growled old Finchdean, running heavily forward. "Good shot, too. Dead as a dog, you with your bored ways and false friendship. You should've learned a bit more, Stoughton, before you set out to short circuit us."

He kicked the limp body as he arrived, with the blustering, loud laugh of a bully.

And as if for answer—without warning—a fist and a pistol butt flashed upward from somewhere among the tumbled confusion of Norman Stoughton's limbs. Without a sound, as if the very ground had been slid from under his feet, Finchdean's great bulk collapsed in a heap.

James was unarmed, and he never moved—nor had the lurcher. Man and dog stood rigid, staring at each other, the animal with clean fangs bared. They seemed to have arrived at a perfect understanding without the use of words.

"Well," murmured Stoughton, quietly rising like one from sleep. "That's about all, I think—bar the police. No, I'm not wounded, Barnham; simply foxing, you know. Doctor for Finchdean? Scarcely, my friend, he'll come round presently, and be out of this country before you know. And until he is, I'm going to take you home with me."

Four weeks later, Olga Bilbury and Jack Barnham Finchdean were married, and, long before that, A. B. Finchdean and his son left the country, never to return.

But Barnham never knew what old man Bilbury paid Norman Stoughton, or that he paid him at all. And, as Stoughton said: "They're both happy, and old man Bilbury's happy, and I'm happy, so that ends it!"

Trail Pard

IN ALL THE WEST THERE WAS NO FRIENDSHIP TO EQUAL
THIS ONE—UNTIL THE GIRL APPEARED

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Stolen Steers," "The Starlit Trail," etc.

TWO thirsty travelers from the desert came to Cobb's Coulee, dismounted at the first corral, and raced to the water trough. They drank their fill at a pipe which fed the trough from an artesian well. They ducked their heads under the pulsating spurts, thrust their hot wrists and arms into the water, and washed the burning alkali from their eyes and necks.

When they were through they looked like men who had been guzzling cuevo for several days. The water intoxicated them.

They were bleary; their eyes had lost focus; their grim, thirst-tortured mouths had loosened and slobbered to the good-natured grin of the inebriate. The sun-baked shacks of Cobb's Coulee, a little way off, circled and danced before their eyes; the sage-covered ground heaved like the decks of a ship, and the billows of sand rolled like beach combers.

Sick as they were, they had been transported from hell to Paradise, and being tough customers, with stomachs hardened by months of Mexican beans, flapjacks, and bacon, their sickness amounted to nothing compared to the rejuvenation of their souls.

They reeled off immediately for the main tent of a traveling rodeo show which consisted of a palmist, a fake cowboy, a few trained broncs and a sharpshooter. They entered with the air of two drunk prospectors about to shoot up the congregation.

The miners and gamblers there assembled knew them, but their periodic appearance in Cobb's Coulee always mystified the town. The two travelers came up from the Coyotero with the hilarious attitude of pocket-hunters who had discovered a mountain of gold, but they never went to the assay office or to the district recorder's. They never

discovered any mines, and they never had any money.

Their occupation, it must be said, was peculiar. The story that they had spent three years visiting the various pueblos in the study of cochineal dyes would forever remain an enigma. A man could be a prospector, or an Indian agent, or a barber, or a horse doctor; but this business of studying the coloring matter of a Papago blanket—well, that sounded fishy.

The older and homelier of the two men—a florid-faced, groggy, loose-jointed gentleman by the name of Jo Hawkes—objected to the performance that was being staged. He objected to the gypsy palmist, and to the legerdemainist. He objected to the little man with the waxed mustache and curly hair who was being introduced as the greatest sharpshooter of all times and climes.

"He ain't the greatest anything of anywhere!" said the groggy scarecrow.

The management, who was used to handling these cases, laughed with a partly successful affectation of good humor. "All right, my friend," he said. "His trick is to look in a mirror and shoot a egg outen his assistant's hand."

"That don't make him a champion. There's some one who can beat him at that—and anything else—right here in this very tent."

"All right, stranger, just who is it?"

"Jo Hawkes."

"Who's Jo Hawkes?"

"I'm Jo Hawkes."

"Well, I'm glad to meet you, sir," said the management. He turned his back on the unwelcome guest and announced:

"Now, ladies and gents, the next number on the program—"

"Will be myself!"

"Oh, no, sir. You better not try no shootin' in the condition you're in."

"He's all primed up," Jo Hawkes's partner said. "He can shoot straighter when he's like that. Give him a chance."

"Give him a chanst!" a mucker in the audience called out, seconded by others. "Leave this here Jo show us—if he's so all-fired wonderful!"

Jo Hawkes swung his lanky frame up to the little stage and stood there, swaying dizzily and grinning at the audience.

"Come on, pard," he said. "We'll show 'em."

The pard was a younger man, much better looking and also much groggier. He rolled a cigarette with considerable difficulty—losing most of the tobacco—and stuck it in his loose wet lips.

"Shoot out this cheroot, pard," he calmly suggested.

Several of the Mexicans in the rear of the tent thought it time to get out. A ranch wife gathered her two children and followed suit. The management was alarmed.

But with this beetle-browed, rangy-looking desert rat standing there on the stage, swaying with a six-gun in hand, the management considered it wise to keep still. There was—after all—nothing to be shot up except the audience.

The little man with the waxed mustache slid down from the rear of the platform, and disappeared. His part of the afternoon's performance was over.

What happened then came as a surprise to every man in that tent. If the two apparently intoxicated desert gentlemen had started to fight every one in the audience, it would not have been unexpected. Instead, the outcome was quite peaceable—but none the less dramatic.

Jo Hawkes took up the hand mirror which the preceding performer had dropped, turned his back on his pard who stood on the opposite side of the platform. As Hawkes squinted with a bleary eye into the glass and pointed his revolver over his shoulder, the part of the audience on that side of the tent stampeded to the other side.

Hawkes brought the sight of his gun into line, by means of his mirror, and for a moment swayed back and forth, scowling and swearing. "Funny that water has such a tricky effect on a man's eye!" he mumbled.

"Sure you don't bear me a grudge for that last scrap we had?" his pard inquired, smoking nonchalantly.

"If I plug you it won't be for that," Hawkes replied. "It 'll be because this mirror's crooked."

"Sure you're forgettin' that fight we had over the burned flapjacks."

"It ain't flapjacks—it's this glass, which needs a bath even worse 'n you do."

"Or that last fist fight, when you told me I must lay off being too friendly to that little squaw."

This would have brought jeers, but the audience was too breathless for any demonstration of humor. The cigarette was burned down pretty low.

"Better call a stop to this!" an old stockman cried from the back of the tent. "Looks like plain murder! They're both boiled!"

The six-gun blazed out. There was a shower of sparks in front of the victim's mouth. Jo Hawkes turned around and staggered toward his pardner.

"You sure did burn my mouth, pard," the latter complained, wiping his lips.

"You weren't standing steady," Jo Hawkes declared. "You were dipping up and down. Regular waltz. Damned if I didn't think I was shooting at a merry-go-round."

"And damned if he didn't use a real slug, too!" the management exclaimed, examining the tent flap behind Jo's pard.

"Tried to kill me, that's what!"

The miners and stockmen crowded around. "A real slug, so help me!" one cried. "Thought it was a frame-up!" said another.

"Frame-up!" the pard snorted, nursing his injury. "'Course it was a frame-up. Lucky I wasn't murdered."

"Give us some more, Jo!" a cowboy yelled enthusiastically.

"More! Oh, no! He's not going to come Injun on me!" said the pard.

"No more!" cried the old stockman in the rear. "They'll kill each other yet!"

The management held up his hand. "Ladies and gents!" he cried. "We're thanking these two strangers for their performance. And we invite them to visit all our booths free of charge. You'll find the palmist's booth over by—"

"Don't send 'em out—we want some more!" a rancher shouted, observing Hawkes laughing at his enraged pard.

The management, aware that trouble was coming, tried to change the subject. "The next number, ladies and gents, will be Signor Pallapi, the legerdemainist. He will show you a miracle or two with the good ole card deck!"

"A miracle—aye?" Hawkes's pard repeated excitedly. "Let me show you a miracle. Give me the deck."

"But—" The management was rudely silenced.

"Leave him show us some more!" some one in the audience cried. Others added: "We don't want no play-actin'. We don't want no circus men! Leave the two gents from the desert show us some miracles!"

"The young gent from the desert, ladies and gents," Jo Hawkes announced, "as a lot of you townsfolk recollect, is generally known as Tom Jimson—my pard!"

Tom Jimson demanded the pack from Signor Pallapi, and the latter, of course, dared not refuse him. Whereupon, Tom commenced shuffling the cards in a most extraordinary manner.

The spectators thought that he had three hands affixed to his right arm—such was the speed of his movements. The cards whirled and hummed, and as every man in that tent riveted his eyes upon the performance, kings and jacks began sailing out over their heads.

Those among them who had phenomenal eyesight observed that Tom's hand, after spinning out each card, returned to his chest and snapped out again. The gesture was so fast that no one noticed the seeming futility of it. Nor did every one see a knife whiz out from the stranger's bosom—as if he were merely dealing another card.

A yell from Signor Pallapi called the audience's attention to the fact that his brown derby was stabbed.

The audience roared; Signor Pallapi turned color; the management put up his hands and objected: "Look here, gents, this is going too far."

"A new derby, too!" Signor Pallapi cried, enraged, as the performer asked him for his knife.

It was a peculiar knife—not the sort of bowie knife a desert prospector would be using. Tom Jimson had found it in his expeditions to the desert Indians. A witch doctor had fashioned it so that the long, stiletto-like blade had three edges.

When it stabbed, it left a triangular scar; and such a scar on his shoulder Tom

showed to his acquaintances, when he was loquacious, demonstrating the fact that he had won it as a trophy of war.

Again he shuffled the cards. Jo Hawkes was splitting his sides in laughter at the brown derby and its enraged owner. Then, zip! Right out of the pack the knife came whizzing.

This time it lodged in Jo Hawkes's ragged lop-brimmed sombrero!

"Well, I'll be caterwopously damned!" he roared.

"He's ruined your two-gallon hat!" a local humorist shouted.

The two-gallon hat already had several holes in the crown, and the brim was virtually in shreds. But big Jo Hawkes could not see what the crowd was roaring at.

"Ruin my hat—aye? He tried to ruin me!" Hawkes cried. "A fine way to sagebrush your old pard! I'll work you over—you grinning coyote!"

A lane opened in the crowd as Jo Hawkes—the knife sticking like a buzzard feather in his hat—charged after his partner.

But the latter had darted through an opening and out of the tent. Before a single man of the audience knew what had happened, young Tom Jimson had hopped to his cayuse and fled.

"A pretty good show—beats a rodeo!" a spectator acclaimed. "Looked as if they was goin' to bump each other off! But they was only foolin'! Damn good show!"

"Fooling, you call it?" It was the old rancher in back who spoke. He was recognized now as the foreman of the Jefferson West cattle outfit. "I wouldn't call it foolin'. Them two are after each other's blood! Maybe you don't know that each one told ole Jefferson West's daughter that he'd kill any one as made love to her."

II

THE Box W ranch is situated five miles north of Cobb's Coulee. Neither Tom Jimson nor his partner went there immediately. It was necessary to get in condition. Old Jefferson West's daughter was hard to please. No use thinking she would be interested in two groggy, alkali-covered desert scarecrows.

A meal at Nogales's chowcart sobered them up. They ate separately, of course. Tom Jimson did not want to have another set-in with his pard after that incident in the show tent. He ate while Jo Hawkes was getting his hair cut at the barber's. And

he had his shave and haircut when Jo took his pony to the blacksmith's for a shoeing.

After that, Tom found the coast clear. He wasted some valuable time at the horse doctor's, but his pinto had barely escaped heat-stroke during the recent journey. And that pinto was worth more to him than any girl in the world.

The horse doctor prescribed shorter journeys and less desert gyp water. Whereat, Jimson thanked him and took the trail to the Box W.

The sight of Nellie West in gingham frock, with her bronze curls and dimpled chin, stirred young Jimson's blood. He had a slight regret that that knife he had thrown had missed its mark by three inches. Jo Hawkes, although he was a gruff, lanky, barbarous specimen, was the one thing that stood between Jimson and perfect ecstasy.

Tom believed he could have cut out any cowboy or miner in Cobb's Coulee—or on the whole range, for that matter. But he had a strange misgiving about Jo Hawkes.

Hawkes had some sort of a malign power. He was the greatest pard in the world, and the greatest fighter; but why in the world any woman in her right mind would take a second look at him was more than Jimson could imagine. He was grotesque, he was fierce, he was as uncouth as a *chulo*; he swore, he drank to excess.

Jo was everything a girl hated—even to his long, raw-looking nose. And yet this Nellie West looked at him out of eyes that were aflame with worship. Jimson understood that look well enough—and it made him fighting mad.

"I told you I'd be back on Saturday, the twenty-sixth, at four o'clock—and here I am," he said to the girl.

"I'm right glad to see you, Tom," she declared with a melodious laugh. "You look fine—and you've had a haircut, and Pete the barber has powdered you all up. And where's Jo?"

Tom saw seven shades of crimson flame, but went on:

"Thought I couldn't get here. Desert's burned dry as a cinder. Got fooled on two different water pockets. Pretty near died."

"They told me you two came in all used up. Our foreman told me. He also specified about you boys pretty near doing a little killing—"

"Oh, *that*—well, you see"—Jimson's face was hot and red—"we got a sort of jag on plain water. Can't explain it. Fun-

niest thing ever happened. I find myself standing up in front of him looking into his six-gun. And smiling! Imagine that! He knowing all the time that I'm fighting to the last ditch to get you!"

"That wouldn't make any difference with him," the girl asserted.

Jimson didn't understand at first. Then his face lit up. "Yes, you're right. It wouldn't make any difference. He wouldn't take advantage like that. I knew it. I just stood there and told him to blaze away. And then I found myself throwing a knife. What do you make of that? Throwing a knife right at his head! A few inches lower and it would have sliced open his forehead. Imagine how I felt! Throwing a knife at a bird who's after my girl!"

"I reckon you aimed pretty sharp."

"I'll tell you I did! Never took such careful aim in my life—and every muscle in my body was begging me to make a slip!"

"If you two boys are going to get the whole range thinking you're ready to kill each other because of me, it's time I called all bets off."

"What do you mean? You aren't turning me down, girl? I've still got a chance? You're right about our fighting. That's to stop. But it's not going to stop until you pick out which one of us you want. Can't you decide now, girl? Look at me. I'm ready. We'll get married now—before old Jo horses in here and starts another wild rumpus."

She put out her hand, and he grabbed it eagerly. "I'm going to make up my mind," she announced. "But I'm going to see Jo first."

"Hell's fire! What can you see about a slab-sided, sheep-headed jack like him?"

It was ridiculous. There was Tom Jimson, ten years younger and a good deal better-looking than his partner. And yet for some crazy, whimsical reason this girl could not decide which one to take!

"I'll give you my answer a week from to-day," Nellie West said. "You can make it at the same time, four P.M., Saturday."

"Lots can happen between now and then."

"Not between you two. You're both sports."

"I'm not so sure. When it comes to a girl, two pards—" He swung up to his saddle.

The girl watched him jogging down to-

ward the Cobb's Coulee road. And there, as the logical trend of events would have it—and as the perverse devils of hell ordained it—Tom Jimson met Jo Hawkes!

There were words. The girl could hear their angry voices from where she stood. She knew they were both at high nervous pitch after their gruelling days in the desert. It was not very common in the annals of Cobb's Coulee history to find two men coming out of the Coyotero Desert without a grudge or two. A tiny thing like snoring in one's sleep could develop into a fierce grievance.

She reached the end of the corral in time to hear the gaunt, fierce-looking Hawkes announcing: "We've got to have a show-down, Tom, right here and now. I warned you about coming to see her before I got her!"

"I'm as game for a show-down as you, Jo. And I'd like to have it right now."

"It's up to the girl to choose," Hawkes suggested, as she joined them.

"She won't choose until next Saturday," Tom Jimson said, still confident that he was to be the winner.

Jo dismounted and went to the girl. She put out her hand to him in greeting, and he immediately blurted out the reason for his visit.

"Nell, I've come here to ask you to be my wife. I'll ask in front of this coyote who's always coming Injun on me. Give me your answer, child, right now and prevent a murder."

Nell did not consider that Jo Hawkes had made any better bid for her hand than his partner. "I can't, Jo. It's a serious business. It's my whole life."

"It's my life too—and *that kid's!*" Jo announced this with a deadly emphasis.

"Jo," said Tom Jimson, who was the cooler, "the whole town seems to be getting the idea that we're set on murdering each other."

"I ain't so sure but they're right!" the other remarked caustically.

"Well, they aren't right. You know it! You're all het up. You've had a dozen chances to bump me off, and most likely get the girl. And you never took one. But it's time to end this fool business right now before the sheriff gets after us for attempted murder. You want a show-down. Have it. Have it now. I'll fight you to a knock-out, and the loser agrees here and now to resign and never again shine up to the girl."

"No! No! It's ridiculous. You must not!" the girl cried desperately. "Give me a few days, I beg you. Give me just a little time to think. There must be no fighting. I don't want to marry a brute."

Hawkes seemed to cool off miraculously. "I wouldn't fight him in a thousand years!" he laughed.

"No, I beg you! Be civilized. What 'll fighting gain you? I won't have it!"

"Just why won't you fight me, Jo?" the younger man challenged hotly.

"Because I could lick you a thousand ways for Sunday."

"Oh, so that's it! Well, I'm challenging you. I can knock you for a goal in just about ten seconds."

"I'm stronger, and have the reach and also the eye," Jo Hawkes laughed. It was a maddening laugh.

"And I've got ten years on my side," said the other cuttingly. "And also I can keep my head when you're snorting around like a Galloway bull."

"Oh, you can, can you? Well, in that case you're just forcing me to squash you. Do you hear that, girl? He's bringing this on himself. He challenged me, and then he taunts me. Well and good. I'll step on him here and now before your eyes. No need of referees. We'll be fair. *You* can referee. And when he takes a chew out of that tumbleweed just count ten."

"And the bird that takes the count first agrees to withdraw," Tom demanded.

"He sure does," Jo agreed exuberantly.

They threw off their leather vests, their gauntlets, and their sombreros. The girl screamed. A sleepy old cowhand came waddling down from the barn. The cook appeared at the door of the chuckhouse.

Two or three horses—according to the custom of horses—meandered down to the lower end of the corral to see what this rum-pus was all about. They came to see the fight, but the hens and the roosters ran in the other direction.

Then Tom Jimson, who was quick and eager, lit in with a furious rush.

And Jo Hawkes stopped him with a bone-crashing blow on the mouth.

Two *chulos* and a prospector came to Cobb's Coulee on the same day. They rode shaggy desert cayuses which were considerably the worse for hard and fast trailing. One of the half-breeds was a white giant of a man with a hook nose and beady eyes.

The other was a squat youth with horselike hair which hung over glowering eyes. The prospector, a thin, sun-dried man with a flustered air, galloped his horse into town ahead of the others and went directly to the sheriff's office.

One might have thought that he was being chased by the other two desert rats. This, however, was not the case. They were chasing somebody—but not old Luck Withers.

"They's goin' to be trouble in this here town, chief," Luck said to the sheriff. "And it's them *chulos* agin."

The sheriff gave ear, for he had had a hard time keeping peace between his town and that *chulo* settlement down in the Coyotero. "What's their game this time?" he demanded.

"Well, chief, it's this way. A couple young *hombres* who are investigatin' dyes and cochineal and Papago blankets met up with them *chulos*, and one of the *hombres*—a bird by the name of Tom Jimson—why, he got to investigatin' a little too far. One of them *chulo* gals fell for him and wanted him for her husband, which same he wasn't agreeable to."

The sheriff thought for awhile, thrusting his tobacco cud from one side of his leathery mouth to the other. Then:

"Did this bird Jimson make love to the *chulo* gal?"

"No. That's just it. And that's why I'm comin' to you to warn you to protect the boy. Mind you, I ain't sayin' young Jimson didn't shine up a bit. The *chulo* was right purty, and he bein' a good-lookin' boy—with a sort of way with women-folk—won her over. I ain't sayin' he didn't smile a bit, and all that. But I know them two fellows, Jimson and his pard, and they're both straight."

"These dirty *chulos* are always huntin' up trouble," the sheriff said. "I know their game. I seen Judge Idaho ride in just behind you. He always wants to start somethin' with us whites."

"He's the gal's father," the other man divulged.

"H-m! Well, that's a little more serious. And how about the square-faced breed with the horsehair hangin' over his ears?"

"That's the gal's intended. He's shore feelin' murderous," the prospector replied. "But you see, chief, I, knowin' a bit of the ins and outs of the whole affair, wanted to tell you first, so's you'd understand Tom

Jimson ain't to blame. The young *chulo* is ravin' jealous, and the ole one—"

"The ole one is lookin' for a war," the sheriff shot out heatedly. "I'll bet he's glad enough you come to me. He'll want to make a international complication of it!"

"I kind of figured thataway myself, chief."

"He wants me to step in and chase 'em out of town. Am I right?"

"Ain't so sure but you are right, chief."

"Well, I'm all-fired sure of one thing: I ain't goin' to have anything to do with it."

The other seemed flabbergasted. "You mean you'll let 'em shoot that poor young white man down at sight?"

"They won't find he's so easy to shoot when they see him," the sheriff laughed.

"From what I hear, that kid's a dangerous *hombre* to mix up with. I seen him throw a knife out of a pack of cards wunst when he was playin' poker in the Rex cantina. No one knowed what had happened till they seen a Mex lyin' on the floor with a three-edged stiletto stickin' into his shoulder blade."

"Well, it's two ag'in' one, though, chief; don't forget that," Withers objected.

"Not exactly. Jimson has a pard—which can throw a gun on a six-year-old rattler—and pick off each rattle in succession. Seen him do it." The sheriff bit off another hunk of tobacco, and stretched his huge legs. "You better be warnin' them two *chulos*, instead of comin' to me for protection, mister."

A stockman, who had been at the door listening to this palaver, objected:

"Jimson's pard won't help him—they're layin' for each other for to bump each other off at the first chanst. Bein' they're both fightin' to win the gal of the Box W outfit."

"H-m! That's true, too! Never thought of that!" the sheriff mused. "Well, that bein' the case, Mr. Mucker, I'd admire for you to go out and warn Tom Jimson. Tell him two desert rats is gunnin' for him. And likewise tell him that if he protects hisself by dumpin' 'em, the law won't ax him any too embarrassin' questions."

"I'm glad to git that point cleared up, chief," said Luck Withers as he started out for his cayuse. "I'd hate to see that young kid bumped off by two jealous, ornery *chulos*."

"And I'd hate to see the law of Cobb's Coulee mixed in with it," the sheriff declared. "I ain't settin' in the game. Cain't

order them renegades outen town without they start somethin'. And anything they start I reckon Jimson can finish pronto enough. Either him or his pard."

For about the same length of time that it has taken to recount the above incident, Tom Jimson and his pard were tearing each other to pieces like two pumas.

Not very many witnesses were present at that epic battle. And those who were present found themselves powerless to interrupt it. The girl could do little else than scream and wring her hands and beg them to stop. As a matter of fact, after seeing and hearing about a dozen bone-crashing blows that would have dropped any ordinary man, Nellie West decided to watch the outcome without any further attempt to interrupt it.

She had a reason for this—unknown perhaps to herself. The man whom she favored had the longer reach, the greater experience, the greater anger, and the tougher jaw. In a word, the lanky and hot-headed Jo Hawkes was winning.

His adversary swayed on feet that were now as heavy as lead. His face was cut, his cheek bones raw, his mouth bleeding, his eyes glassy. One more punch and most assuredly the erstwhile agile and clean-cut Tom Jimson would drop.

Hawkes timed himself for the final blow. I use the word "timed" advisedly. For he saw that there was no need whatsoever of any hurry.

Tom was as good as knocked out. He had no idea of what had happened to him, or of what was going to happen. He staggered back against a snubbing post and, propped against it, made threatening passes at Jo with his fists. He had no idea, apparently, that it was the snubbing post that kept him on his feet; he thought he was still fighting.

The girl screamed out to the lanky brute, Jo Hawkes, to spare the boy. She pleaded hysterically that she would never speak to Jo again if he shot out another blow with that bony, bloodstained fist.

But Jo did not hear her. When Jo was mad, mercy was the last thing to hope for. Besides, he knew that if Tom could be put down for the count he would never again pay court to the girl. He had given his word. Each had given his word.

But Jo Hawkes did not deliver that final, well-timed blow. It was lucky for him—

luckier, perhaps, than it was for his pard. Nellie West, contrary to the accepted tradition that all women, from prehistoric times, go to the winner, would have accepted the defeated Tom Jimson on the spot. That is to say, as soon as he could have been resuscitated.

What happened was this: a rider came charging up the cañon toward the Box W corrals.

No one had noticed him until he drew rein, brought his mount to its haunches in a spurt of dust, and dismounted at Jo Hawkes's very elbow.

"What-all you mean by this fist fightin', gents, I don't know," said old Luck Withers. "But you better finish it up pronto and get set for a gun fight instead."

Tom Jimson was still backed against the snubbing post and making threatening passes. The fist fight was still on, as far as he was concerned.

"What do you mean takin' hold of my arm, Luck?" Hawkes cried. "Can't you see I'm beatin' up this young coyote?"

"They's two *chulos* out gunnin' for Tom Jimson—account of that *chulo* gal he met up with in the Coyotero. Judge Idaho hisself and another breed are on the warpath. They're right on my heels now—ridin' up the cañon! Get that groggy young coot off somewheres and bring him to."

Luck was not blind to the fact that Tom Jimson was helpless. The girl had gone to Tom, and was wiping his face with his bandanna.

Hawkes wiped the sweat from his own eyes and looked down at the excited old mucker.

"Two *chulos*, you say," he repeated as if understanding the message for the first time; "and they're gunning for Jimson?"

"That's what I said. And they'll be up here any minute. They seen me trailin' out of Cobb's Coulee for this here rancho, and they guessed right that I was huntin' Tom for to warn him."

"What do they mean gunning for Tom, I'd like to know? The yellow-livered skunks! Trying to take him away from me—aye? Well, I'll show 'em. Think they're going to work him over? Well, I guess damn' well not! I'm the one that's elected for that job! And there's no one going to beat me to it!"

He loosened the flap of his holster, and went to the corral gate. "As for that young coot there, bring him to if you can, girl,"

he called over his shoulder. "I'll knock him cold when I get back."

Old Luck Withers and the girl—and the two farm hands who had witnessed the fight—watched Jo Hawkes running down the cañon.

They saw two horsemen riding up toward him a moment later.

Jo Hawkes ducked behind a bowlder, and waited.

The two *chulos*, riding shaggy desert broncs, headed for him.

When within range, Hawkes presented himself.

The girl and her companions could not hear what he said. But he shouted something hostile.

The *chulos* dropped from their cayuses, the white-haired breed darting for a clump of mesquite; the other crouching behind a sandstone rock.

Hawkes stayed in the open, and the girl saw a wink of light come from his hand. A second later she heard a concussion, like the snap of a rawhide whip.

The young breed fell forward, clutching the greasewood. His companion fired. The girl saw three flashes of light come from the bowlder, followed by three reports. Another flash from Hawkes's long arm, and a report. The white-haired *chulo* dropped his gun, and clutched his hand.

At least the enraged Hawkes had spared the old one's life.

The latter lifted an arm and came into the open. A soft command from Hawkes barely drifted up the cañon. The witnesses saw the breed go to his prostrate companion, lift him, and help him to his horse. Hawkes went to where the fellow had fallen, picked up his gun, and then walked unsteadily up the cañon again toward the ranch.

The girl saw him take off his sombrero and feel of his head. Luck Withers did not miss the gesture. Neither did the two ranch hands.

"Damned if old Idaho didn't crease his sombrero for him!" Luck said.

The girl left Tom Jimson and ran down toward Hawkes.

"What's happened, Jo?" she cried hysterically. "You're hit—your face is gray!"

"Thought I was hit," he mumbled in somewhat of a daze. "Felt as if some one hit me on the side of the head with a

sledge hammer. But the slug didn't so much as cut me."

"Your sombrero—" She saw a neat hole in the crown.

Jo Hawkes looked at it. He did not see the hole that the old *chulo's* shot had made. But he did see the rip made by Tom Jimson's knife that morning at Cobb's Coulee.

"Damned young hellbender!" he cried. "I swear he tried to kill me with that stiletto of his! I'll sure work him over!"

He hurried back to the scene of the combat—the combat that really meant something to him.

"As I was saying before, I was interrupted—" he began, spitting into his fists.

Now, Tom Jimson had had time enough to get a swig from the flask on his hip. It had worked wonders with him. His eye had cleared. He did not know what had happened. There had been some gun shooting down there while he was "coming to." And here was his adversary come back, with his fist doubled, left hand out, right hand poised for the final knock-out.

Tom's eye was miraculously clear. And Hawkes's vision, because of that bullet which had whistled past his temple, was dim. Tom did not know why it was dim. He thought it was the natural outcome of the terrific walloping Tom was sure he had given his pard.

They both struck out—and Jo Hawkes's murderous swing missed the point of Tom's chin by the breadth of a hair.

Jo saw a fist come from the empty air and magnify itself into a balloon. But it did not feel like a balloon when it landed. It felt more like the hoof of a mule.

When Jo Hawkes awakened and found himself staring up into Nellie's tear-stained face, he heard some one say:

"He was down for a count of a hundred and twenty-seven!"

It was the voice of his victorious young pard.

III

HAWKES's lanky form looked about a foot longer as he lay stretched out there with his head in Nellie's lap. When his gray eyes flickered and they poured whisky between his teeth, he passed with the inevitable outburst of oaths across the borderland between sleep and consciousness, came to himself, and then slowly picked up his disjointed carcass.

His young pard smiled at him, silent but

triumphant. The bitter conflict was over. Tom Jimson knew it. And so did poor old Jo Hawkes.

The latter 'put out his hand to Nellie West, and said with a shrug: "Well, good-by, girl. Guess it's all over."

Nellie clutched the hand fervently. "It's not all over, Jo! This fight had nothing to do with it. I said nothing about giving myself to the winner. What do you boys think I am, anyway? Fighting like two jackdogs over a bone! It 'd be a good insult if it wasn't such a joke. Now shake hands with each other and forget it."

"Hell, no! That wasn't in the agreement!" Hawkes said. He took the licking a bit harder than the others had at first expected. "I'm through with both of you, forever."

He turned his back and went for his horse.

But the girl called to him.

"Jo! You're plumb out of your head! It wasn't a fair fight, anyway. You had him licked hands down!"

Jo did not hear—or pretended not to hear. One thing he would not do for love or money, and that was to put himself in the position of claiming an alibi for a licking.

He swung up to his horse, pulled his mutilated sombrero down over his forehead, and hit out for the trail.

They observed that he did not take the Cobb's Coulee road. He was heading straight for the Coyotero Desert.

The girl came back to the victorious Tom Jimson. She dismissed the two ranch hands, ordering the cook to get old Luck Withers a supper. Then she turned to Tom.

"Do you know what happened?" she demanded hotly.

"I know I was pretty groggy. The cowsheds and the corrals were circling about me like a milling herd. I thought I was fighting ten men, so help me. Then something hit me in the back and yanked me up—like a mother holding her kid up by the scruff of his neck. Turned out to be a snubbing post which had caught my vest. Then I thought I landed on Jo's mug, because he disappeared for a long time. He wasn't on the ground, either—as I remember. So I took a swig out of my flask and shook myself. As I was collecting my wits it seems I heard gun shooting—then, lo and behold, Jo comes back and swings on me!

I reckon I caught him a neat one then, all righto!"

"That gun shooting was Jo fighting off a couple of *chulos*—to save your life!" the girl announced accusingly.

"What *chulos*—you mean—"

"Judge Idaho—"

"Holy smoke!" the boy exclaimed. "Then where is he now?"

"Jo wounded them both, broke 'em—and sent 'em packing off home."

"You mean to tell me all that happened while I was swigging down liquor!" He scratched his head, trying to remember. It all came back to him. "Zowie—but I must have been going in circles!" he admitted, shamefacedly.

"And then when Jo came back you thanked him for saving your life by slugging him!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" He scratched his head some more and tried to think. "I heard you say something about the fight not being fair!" he remarked suddenly, giving the girl a piercing look.

"Do you call it fair?" she demanded, warmly. "He had you beaten! Then you knocked him down and think you've won me! Well, you haven't. He's got just about ten chances to your one!"

"Yes, but he won't take 'em," Tom Jimson said. He did not say it triumphantly. He said it as if the words burned his tongue.

And then he exclaimed: "It wasn't fair! I know that!"

"Tom—it's up to you to go after him—and bring him back."

"He won't come."

"Then tell him you want to fight it over again."

Tom winced. His jaw still ached. Every tooth ached. Every finger felt broken. And his head was still throbbing murderously. But he managed finally to say:

"All right, girl, I'll tell him. It's fair. This last fight don't count."

He went to his horse.

"But remember this: I'm coming back Saturday a week from now—as we planned."

Swinging out for the Coyotero trail, he met one of the Box W cowhands.

"Where you goin', Mr. Jimson?" the latter asked.

"I'm goin' to the desert to find my pard—and give him another licking," Tom replied, casually.

He observed that the cowhand did not get the grim sarcasm of that remark.

IV

ON Saturday afternoon a week later four men were gathered in Sheriff Chamisal's office, as was their custom. It was a far-famed quartet which had gone on many a man hunt, which had decided affairs of state for many years at Cobb's Coulee: a sort of coroner's jury, itinerant court and sheriff's posse combined. It consisted of old buzzard-eyed, silver-haired Chamisal himself and of his three deputies—the town barber, the veterinarian, and a barkeep from the Rex cantina.

They had discussed all the pros and cons of the little shooting fray between Hawkes and the two *chulos* at the Box W—and they decided that it was inconsequential. The real issue involved was the fist fight between the two desert pards, Tom Jimson and Jo Hawkes.

"Jo acted within his rights in creasing them two breeds," the sheriff judged. "They come outen the Coyotero lookin' for trouble—and Jo, he give it to 'em and a little more. I ain't goin' to ask him no questions regardin' same. The case is dropped. If old Judge Idaho comes askin' for trouble—which it don't look he will, bein' a week has e-lapsed—why, I'll just tell him that he started a game which I stayed out of it, and which he could finish it."

"Funny thing," the veterinarian remarked, "that old duffer from the desert—I mean Luck Withers—told as how Hawkes saved his pard from them *chulos* so's he could finish beatin' him up."

"Cain't understand it," Sheriff Chamisal confessed. "Unless you figure on the gal of the Box W outfit—"

"That's it," said the barkeep, who apparently knew a thing or two about feminine psychology. "Them two *hombres*, Hawkes and Jimson, don't want no one else to mix in. They're fightin' for the gal. And the fight's betwixt them two and no one else. Any one else, like for instance them *chulos*—why, if they try to set in, neither of the two pards will stand for it. Sort of a Navaho fight. Absolutely private. They'll even save each other's life so's they can murder each other."

This was pronounced the most scientific analysis of the whole affair. Psychologically it was sound. They all knew the Navaho trait. But where the argument fell down

was in the fact that neither Hawkes nor Jimson were Navahos.

The veterinarian covered this point up: "They been living amongst them pueblos so long, huntin' up receeps for dyein' wool, that they've took on a trait or two of the Injuns themselves."

This was also conceded scientific.

"Ever since I seen the flint in that young Jimson's eye," the horse doctor said, "when he throwed a knife out of a card pack, down there in the tent show on Galloway's corral, why, I knew he was bent on murder. The knife caught his pard right in the peak of his sombrero. It was horrifyin', so help me!"

"He wouldn't murder him thataway," Chamisal declared. "Tom Jimson ain't so ornery, snivelin', all-fired, teetotal rotten as that."

"Any bird who kin deal a card pack the way he kin is plumb ornery, and you better watch him," said the barber.

"You ain't intimatin' he ever deals himself a particular card?" the barkeep demanded, incredulously.

"I don't know. But he showed a couple gamblers that he could deal a straight flush—right under their noses—and they couldn't for the life of them tell how he done it!"

"That don't mean he cheats," the barkeep asserted. "I seen him play a hundred games of poker, if one—and he lost every one of 'em. Never saw him win yet. That don't look like cheatin'."

"Well, the way his hand whirs when he's dealin' looks thataway!" said the veterinarian. "I played him once."

"Did you lose?"

"No, I won. But I come away with a powerful eye-ache!"

"We're driftin' away from the point in question," Sheriff Chamisal complained. "Tom Jimson is honest—and so's his pard. But when you stick in a unknown factor like the gal from the Box W—"

"It ain't a unknown factor," said the veterinarian. "Answer's easy enough for me. One of them gents is goin' to murder the other afore a week's up. Why, ole Luck Withers told me he seen Hawkes ride off to the desert. And a little later—most like after the gal had turned young Jimson down, and Jimson was smartin' under the thrashin' his pard had give him—why, Jimson went off to the desert likewise. He had knocked Hawkes out, but that made no

difference. He was trailin' him for to git him—just the same."

"How did Withers know that?"

"Why, Tom Jimson told a cowhand these very words!" the veterinary replied. "And when he does it, mark my words, he will do it with that three-edged stiletto and a pack of cards!"

It was at this climactic point of the afternoon's session of the Cobb's Coulee quartet that a lone rider came up from the Coyotero.

He was a fat man, and the heat of the afternoon had gone hard with him. He was melting, and tortured. His crimson face, pudgy lips, and little eyes were powdered with alkali. Alkali covered his lop-brimmed sombrero; it was dusted like snow over his beefy shoulders; it was caked like a cantina girl's powder in the creases of his two chins.

He came directly to the sheriff's office, and exchanged greetings with all four of the men there assembled, for he knew them; and they knew him as a sutler who kept an outfitting post in a deserted mining town called Chloride.

"Are you interested in roundin' up murderers, chief?" he asked wheezingly.

Sheriff Chamisal allowed that under certain circumstances he was. "Of course, if some fool Papago down your way has murdered a *chulo*, I ain't interested. I ain't no Indian Agent."

"Well, this don't happen to be a case for the Indian Agent," said the fat sutler. "It's a case for the sheriff of Cobb's Coulee. Bein' the murdered and the killer is both residents of this here town. I mean they started out on their business from this town."

"What business—"

"The investigatin' of Papago and Nava-ho dyes for a Eastern chemical concern."

The sheriff looked at the barber, and the barber at the horse doctor, and the horse doctor at the Rex cantina barkeep. Then they all looked at the perspiring sutler, as if to say: "You can't surprise us, *hombre*. We knew it all along."

Sheriff Chamisal asked with astonishing equanimity: "Which one did the killin'?"

"A gent by the name of Jo Hawkes," the sutler replied.

Now this announcement was what brought the surprise. They had all expected the fight to end up in murder. Two hot-headed, desert-hardened men like Hawkes

and Jimson could not be expected to go after the same girl without bumping into trouble. But they had all expected that Tom Jimson was the one who would do the murdering.

There was something about Jo Hawkes which appealed to the Western imagination as honest. He was rugged, plain-spoken, and homely, and with a lightning trigger finger. He was the sort of man that could never do wrong, and could never, for that matter, be beaten. That is to say, not unless he were knifed.

Knifing did not appeal to the Western mind. If one pard murdered another, it would not be a gun fanner; it would be a knife expert. And that little card trick of Tom Jimson's with the whirl of a flying knife had impressed every one who had seen it or heard of it. It was the trick that would beat honest old Hawkes.

But here came the announcement that Hawkes had won!

"Well, I'd admire to have you specify what-all happened, Mr. Sutler," the sheriff said.

"It's simple enough, chief—and gents," the obese trader replied. The others leaned forward in their chairs and listened. The thick puffs of smoke from their cigars testified to their excitement.

"It was like this: Jo Hawkes—he's the big one, the rangy one—well, he come horsin' down to my joint, outfitted hisself for a trip, and asked for a bunk for to spend the night. Said he was headin' into the Coyotero to find a Papago shaman which same was a dyer of blankets. Spent the evenin' discussin' dyes made from coal tar—and how the Mexes made red ouden cochineal and tin. Queer coot. I was afear'd of him. Had murder in them wolf eyes of his. I was glad when a prospector come up from the Coyotero and stopped for water and a meal. Prospector and Jo Hawkes fraternizes, and then they gets into a poker game—"

"Who won?" the barber asked.

"They didn't finish. They was an interruption. This unfortunate young heifer, Tom Jimson, comes ridin' hell-bent down—for to fight his pard."

"How do you know he come for to fight him?" the sheriff asked.

"He said so. I was in the room. I heard everything. I heard him bust right in—and say he weren't satisfied with the way the fight went up at the Box W. Don't

know nothin' about that myself. But leastwise they was mention of a gal—"

"Yes, we know all about it," said the sheriff. "They started to fight about the gal from the Box W?"

"Young Jimson—nice, clean-cut lookin' bird with clear black eyes and bronze skin and—"

"We all know what he looks like," the sheriff interrupted impatiently. "Handsome kid which all the cantina gals is daft about him. Go on with your story."

"Well, I was sorry for him. Hawkes had the look of a rattler blazin' outen his eyes. They was a long palaver—which I couldn't understand the ins and outs of it—and Hawkes said all right, he'd fight it out then and there—bein' that was what young Jimson wanted."

"And who won the fight?" the barber inquired, testily.

"Wait a minute. They waren't no fight. The prospector from the desert—a affable gent which he wasn't much at cards, but he was sociable and sort of lonely. Why, he wanted to go on with the game—bein' he was behind—and he fixed it up with the two, sayin' he hated fights, and to wait till he left, which he would do afore midnight. Both Hawkes and his pard was itchin' to have the fight over with, but the sociable prospector won out. Not only did he postpone their fight, but he actually asked young Jimson to set in on the game. And Jimson did, so help me!"

The sheriff laughed. "Jimson always sets in on a game. Never knowed him to refuse a hand."

"And never knowed him to win," the Rex cantina barkeep added.

"Well, he sure lost this time!" the sutler said. "And in more ways than one. I was dead sleepy, but I watched the game an hour or two. Hawkes, he lost all he'd won and got out, and from the corner of the room started swearin' and mumblin', and sort of workin' hisself up for the fight. Finally, bein' too all-fired sleepy to watch the game any more—and not wishin' to mix up with the fight—I went to bed. Afore goin' I advised the prospector to get out afore it was too late—or they'd start blazin' away at each other with him in betwixt 'em. But seems he was winnin' now, and Tom Jimson was losin' fast and furious—"

"As usual," said several of the listeners.

The sheriff smiled. The whole recital held true to form: the murderous-looking

Hawkes; the lonely prospector wanting a game; and young Jimson willing to postpone a fight for the sake of a game—and, as usual, losing all his money.

"Then what?"

"Don't know. I went to bed," the sutler explained.

The others looked disappointed.

"Thought you said Jo Hawkins killed Tom Jimson?"

"Yes, but that happened after I went to sleep. I heard some gun-shootin'. I jumped up and tried to think where I was at. When I pulled on my boots and got to the corral I seen that the prospector had gone—as he said he would. His horse, which he'd left saddled, wasn't at the hitchin' post. He'd most like left after he'd cleaned Jimson out. And then the two pards, bein' alone, had started in on their show-down."

"If it was gun fightin', it means Hawkes lost his temper," the sheriff decided. "If young Jimson had lost *his* temper, it wouldn't of been a gun fight. It would of been a knife whizzin' outen his card pack."

"Well, gents, it was all clear enough to me. I got to the back door of the tradin' shack—where they'd had their game—just after the shootin'. I could even smell the powder—air bein' so close. And rushin' to the front of the shack, I seen Hawkes totin' the body of his pard. He'd mounted his cayuse, and had the carcass swung over the hoss's withers in front of the pommel."

"Where did he head for?" the sheriff asked.

"That I don't know, chief. He went down outen the mouth of my cañon, and which way he trailed I don't know."

"Why didn't you follow him?" four men asked.

"Me follow him—follow Jo Hawkes? A killer? A gunman with blood on his hands—and his eyes glintin' with murder? Oh, no, gents! You don't mean to tell me you blame me for not trailin' him. What was Jimson to me? Was I his keeper? No! He waren't *my* pard. He was Hawkes's pard. Hawkes was his keeper—not me!"

"Is that the end of your re-port?" Sheriff Chamisal asked.

"Not quite. They's one point more. A point which it will show you gents that Hawkes was the orneriest thievin' hell-bender as ever double-crossed a pard! Listen to this: he actually come back a half hour later—for to get his pard's hoss!"

The barber whistled; the veterinarian

and the barkeep swore. Sheriff Chamisal scratched his thin dry hair.

"Why didn't you hide behind a barn and plug him?" the horse doctor asked.

"Me plug him!" the sutler exclaimed with widened eyes. "Plug Hawkes? Wow, that's a good one! Maybe you gents don't know what sort of a sharpshooter that hell-bender is!"

The four admitted that they did. He had, while virtually intoxicated, beaten a professional sharpshooter just a week ago. Recalling how Hawkes had blown a cigarette out of his pard's mouth by the use of a mirror, not one of the four blamed the sutler.

"He took the hoss—a pinto," the sutler said, "and seen' me watchin', he said: 'I'm takin' my pard's hoss, Mr. Sutler. And I'm sayin' good-by with these few remarks: Don't ever repeat what you seen happen to-night, or you'll find yourself out in a gulley somewheres, with the coyotes chawin' the nose offen your daid carcass.'" "

The sutler repeated this with a shudder, but he added: "You see, gents, he didn't scare me. I come right up here, eatin' up the trail as fast as it was ever ate—and told you, chief—accurately and truthfully, so help me God, just what happened."

Sheriff Chamisal was satisfied. There was no doubt about the sutler's account. The sutler was a truthful man. He had always been accurate in his recital of events down there on the edge of the Coyotero. A little cowardly perhaps—or you might say diplomatic, for he always stayed out of fights. But then keepers of trading posts in the Coyotero had always done that from time immemorial. You can't be a sutler very long in the Coyotero if you don't run when gun fighters start quarreling. Aside from that, this particular sutler was a good man, as traders go, a shrewd man, a truthful man.

"Gents," Sheriff Chamisal said, "it looks as if us four better shine up our guns, stock up with a box or two of cartridges, saddle our hosses, and git a goin'."

"Hawkes will be down to Mexico by now," the sutler remarked.

"Not on that old stove-up desert cayuse of his," laughed Chamisal.

"Well, he's got two—that little pinto of his pard's," the fat sutler pointed out.

"That pinto was sick—the last I seen it," the veterinarian said. "Maybe you gents don't know that Tom Jimson brought

that pinto to me last week when he came to town—even afore he went to see his gal."

Sheriff Chamisal and the others saw no particular importance to this bit of news, except that it boded well for the posse.

"Come on, gents," Chamisal ordered; "let's start the trailin'!"

V

SHERIFF CHAMISAL was old and crafty. He kept the range pretty clear of horse thieves. He was not particularly modern or scientific in his methods of crime detection, but he had a trick or two. They were old tricks, although Chamisal thought he had discovered them himself. And the miners of the Coyotero and the stockmen of the Cobb's Coulee ranges credited him with their discovery.

He had found out, for instance, that in the West it is as important to keep tab on horses as it is on men. He knew Jo Hawkes's calico. And he knew Tom Jimson's paint. He knew their tricks and their manners; he knew their hoofprints; he knew their speed; he knew—with the assistance of his crony, the horse doctor—the general state of their health.

As for the men, he was not so well posted. He understood nothing about the dye business—didn't know there was such a business. He allowed that Navahos made blankets—but the fact that they had some secrets of mordanting wool, or getting blue dyes from coal tar, or indigo from alkali salt—such a complex industry never bothered him. But there were circumstances in this Jimson-Hawkes case which were simpler of comprehension, as well as much more important.

In the first place, they had traveled together in the desert. And that will make any two men hate each other. In the second place, they were fighting men; in the third place, they were both hell-bent in love with the same girl.

Now that girl must be considered. And it was here that old Chamisal showed his innate wisdom.

"If Hawkes killed Jimson while fightin' over that gal, then how come you men think he's goin' to hit for Mexico? Here's a man hot enough in love with a gal to kill his pard; here's a man whose hoss can be beat by the slowest hoss of my posse; here's a man who ain't afraid of me, nor of Jimson's three-edged bowie, nor of nobody! And what's your fool answer? He hits for

Mexico. Well, he ain't hittin' for Mexico! That's *my* answer. They's only one place any man would hit for under the circumstances—and that's to the gal!"

"We allow there's some sense to them conclusions, chief," the horse doctor admitted freely.

"He'll hit for the Box W, tell the gal he wants her, ask her to outfit him with grub and a couple of fast hosses; and maybe to hide him for a day or two. Who wouldn't do that?"

"Nobody."

"Very well, then, men. Let's hit out for the Box W right pronto." He turned to the sutler. "Are you coming, Pete?"

The fat man seemed to change in demeanor. He was like a wax image slowly responding to a hot fire.

"I ain't so sure that would be wise, chief," he pleaded. "You see, Hawkes threatened that I wasn't to say nothin' about his murderin', and if you figure they's a chanst of his showin' up at the Box W—why, I'd just as soon show up somewheres else."

Chamisal and his cronies smiled, and considered this a very wise resignation from the game. It was likewise a further proof that the sutler had told the truth.

"Let's go out without him, then, gents," the sheriff said.

And so they did.

At the Box W late that afternoon they told Nellie West what had happened.

Needless to say, she could not believe. "Jo Hawkes wouldn't kill his friend—you men know that, every one of you! Use your heads. Wake up. Figure out another joke."

But the sutler's testimony was repeated to her: The two pards had fought; mention of the girl had been made repeatedly; the sutler had retired; he had heard the shot; he had seen Hawkes carrying the dead Jimson slung across his horse like a sack of bran. Jimson's pinto—which the girl knew was a beloved pet—was left at the trading post, and a little later the thieving murderer had come back and demanded it, and threatened the sutler to silence under penalty of death.

"There's your bare facts, gal," the sheriff supplemented. "How about it? Any one of them facts would hang him—if I had my say. And you won't find nobody around here any too lenient with a bird who shoots down a young pard that's fol-

lowed him around the Coyotero Desert for a couple years!"

Still the girl would not believe.

"There's been some hideous mistake," she cried, "and before you go lynching anybody, chief, you wait till you learn the truth."

"I ain't never doubted my friend Pete, the sutler," he said.

"You wait!" Nellie repeated. "Tom Jimson was not killed, if I know anything. He'll be up here this afternoon—he promised he would. And he's never yet failed to keep his word."

"How kin he keep his word if they ain't nothin' left of him but a carcass?" the horse doctor asked, peering at the girl over his brass-rimmed specks.

"Well, if he shows up here this aft," the sheriff admitted, "I'll allow that we won't lynch his pard for murderin' him. That's easy."

His tone changed from the facetious. "But if you want to know the way I've doped this out, scientific like, gal, I'll tell you: we come here not expecting Tom Jimson to show up. We expect Hawkes hisself—the murderer."

"Hawkes won't come," the girl said, recalling the determination he had shown of sticking to the agreement after that fatal fist fight. "Jo Hawkes won't come back."

"How long are we goin' to wait here, chief?" the barber asked. "If Hawkes ain't here now—maybe you've guessed wrong."

"Tom Jimson will be here before sunset," the girl affirmed.

The sheriff looked at her quizzically, then shook his head. It was one place where woman's intuition failed. Jimson was dead. If he did not come, it showed that he was dead—or else pretty badly wounded. He believed in the girl's opinion of Jimson to that extent.

"Jimson is dead," Chamisal announced. "And bein' he's dead, Hawkes will come back for you—and for your help. Ain't that right, gents? And turnin' the argument inside out, we have this here conclusion: if Hawkes comes, he's guilty."

"All right," the girl almost laughed, "I'll agree to that."

And she meant it.

A half an hour later something happened. It served to show that old Chamisal was as good a detector of horse thieves or killers as Cobb's Coulee had ever known.

A rider came up from the Coyotero.

They saw a red cloud of dust smirching the sunset. They watched breathlessly.

"I told you he'd come!" the girl cried joyfully. She was convinced that the whole tragic business was about to be untangled. "Tom's coming!"

She watched. The posse watched. The ranch hands watched. And Chamisal—whose old eyes were like the eyes of an eagle—watched. Finally he said:

"Gents, I want you-all to git under cover. Which I don't mean you're to ambush that *hombre*. It means you're to be ready at my call. One of you git behind that shake barn—another in the main ranch house—another climb into the calf shed. And, gal, I don't want none of your cowhands to give him any warnin'. Leave him ride right here—"

The girl's heart leaped and missed a beat. Her face was drained of blood. She had eagle eyes herself. They were used to scanning the mesas and sage plains for drags, or maverick calves, or mares enticed away to the herds of the wild stallions.

She saw first that the horse riding up the cañon bed from the desert was a calico. But that might prove nothing. Jimson could be riding his pard's horse—under certain hypothetical circumstances. But then she saw the tall-peaked two-gallon hat. She saw the peculiar swing of the lanky rider—an easy, lithe swing. He was a good rider, that fellow.

"Then it's true!" she scarcely breathed.

They heard her—those other men who were not as keen-eyed as she.

"Yes—true!" said Chamisal, scowling under beetling gray brows. "All right, gents. Get to your places. It's as I said. Jo Hawkes is the one which has come back."

VI

CHAMISAL, still the crafty old rascal that he was, made a dicker with the girl. She wanted to talk to Jo Hawkes. Well, that had its drawbacks: she might warn Jo that the sheriff had posted men all around him; she might by some ruse he'd him escape.

That was drawback enough. But there was a compensation: if the sheriff could stay within hearing, he might learn the last bit of truth necessary to convict his man.

Chamisal was not only crafty; he was cautious. He was fair. He was unlike some of the sheriffs of the frontier, in that he never hanged a man without trial. And

that policy of his often got him into trouble; he had lost many a rustler by this very habit of sticking to the letter of the law. Now in this case he was determined not to lose his man. He wanted to nail him with the goods.

"I'll stay in this here doorway—and you call your friend up to this here veranda," Chamisal said. "I guarantee none of my men will start anything. They're just here actin' as guards—not as hangmen. You kin have your little heart-to-heart talk with the hell-bender. But, bein' I run a risk allowin' you this favor, I want to ask a favor back. *You get his gun offen him.*"

That request shows how cautious Sheriff Chamisal was. He knew Hawkes's reputation. He did not want any of his own cronies to engage in a gun duel, because he was fairly certain that Hawkes would get two out of the four before being stopped.

The girl took some time to think. She gazed at the little smirch of alkali dust out of which the form of Jo Hawkes had appeared. She yearned to talk to Jo. She wanted to know the truth.

The fact that Jo was in jeopardy gave her a peculiar pang. It was the pang of a mother for a bad boy who is about to be punished by some one other than herself. If she had known her mind, it would not be far from the truth to say that Nellie West's feelings for big, lanky Jo Hawkes had blossomed in the last five minutes into fierce and anxious love.

Seeing him loping up toward her meant, to all rational appearances, that Jo Hawkes had killed, or wounded, or otherwise put his pard, Tom Jimson, out of the way. The fact that he might be a murderer sent another pang through the girl's body. It was a pang commingled of many vital emotions, among which love and fear were uppermost.

He came to her, dismounted, and went up the steps. Tears were coursing down her cheeks. But her eyes in a moment were dry. She realized that Jo Hawkes was surrounded by armed men, any of whom, if something went wrong, might kill him. It was no time for tears, thinking of that.

"What in tarnation's got you, girl?" he cried. "Your lips are blue—and they're trembling."

She collected her scattered wits. She reached to the railing of the piazza for support. Then:

"Where's Tom?"

Jo Hawkes's long face hardened.

"Thought you'd ask me that," he said. "Well, I don't belong here, I know. And he does. He won that fight, even though he said he didn't. He followed me to the desert, wanting to fight it over again—sentimental little pup! I told him to go to hell. He'd won. You're his."

"Where is he?"

"I didn't come to be asked that. Hell, no! We're through. But I came to tell you he wouldn't be here this aft—as he promised. He wanted me to tell you. It's the last thing he said."

"What do you mean by that—the last thing he said?" she cried voicelessly. "Jo—you don't mean—"

"I mean that I came to tell you that. And also to tell you that he—well, damn it—" It came hard, but he got it out. "That he's all right in the long run. I've tested him. And he came out all right. Don't think I'm here to ask you to be my wife—no, by God! That would be playing a pretty measly game. I won't take advantage of him."

The girl was ashen white. "Go on, Jo—tell me the rest. Tell me why you came back to me!"

"I didn't come on my account. I haven't the right now!" he flared. "I came on Tom Jimson's account—to give you this message: you won't see him for a long time. But remember him. He wants you to remember him—"

"Jo! Tell me quick—for God's sake, tell me: where is he? What happened to him? Then it's true—you killed him!"

The girl could never describe the strange expression that this brought to Hawkes's face. He looked grim. He actually smiled with a terrible sort of humor. The color had drained from his face. He tried to speak, but his voice tricked him. He tried again.

"Jimson had an engagement with a Papago—down at the Rawhide pueblo."

"He had an engagement with me this afternoon. Why didn't he keep it?" The girl had grown suddenly cool. She looked into Hawkes's steel-like eyes, and for the first time in her memory she saw them falter.

"Yes, but he can't keep it—" he began irresolutely.

"He always keeps it—unless something pretty serious has happened to him."

"Oh, no—nothing has happened to him. Don't you worry. You'll have the young

kid back. Don't worry." He had found his voice, but he spoke looking at the toe of his big boot. "You see this Papago had some trick using borax and alkali for making a blue. We've been after that blue for two years."

"Tom wouldn't have broken his engagement with me—even for that," the girl scoffed.

"Well, he did. He went down to Rawhide. And the shaman took him off to a zacalli in the desert. He's there now, but he'll be back."

"What part of the desert?"

"Near Soda Mesa."

"You're lying, Jo."

Jo said nothing. He set his jaw, twirled his sombrero a moment, then said resolutely: "Good-by. It's the last you'll see of me."

"Where are you going?"

He didn't seem to know the answer to this. He mumbled something about the Coyotero. But she put out her hand to him.

It was surprising how that little hand was able to turn him back. It was a slender, frail lever that had the power to move an immeasurable weight.

"Come here, Jo." She looked up at him. "You've lied for some reason—I don't know why. You're covering something up. The sheriff thinks you've killed your pard. And you're doing your best to make me think the same. But you're lying. Tom Jimson didn't go to Rawhide at all."

"All right, that settles it." He clapped on his sombrero.

"But I'll believe in you, Jo—above everybody else—above the sheriff."

"What are you taking my hand for?" he asked.

"I'll believe in you above Tom Jimson—yes, even above yourself."

He was helpless. He was bewitched by her voice, by her presence, by the touch of her hand. He had been saying words that conflicted with every emotion in his body. He had said good-by; he had said he was through with her; he had said she belonged to Tom. And here she was virtually in his arms, looking up to him with eyes that had a strange light. Hawkes's eyes, looking into hers, burst in flame.

But he stuck to his purpose. He had no right to take advantage of Tom Jimson now.

"What are you holding my hand for?" he repeated.

She released his hand and threw her arms about him; one arm, encircling his neck, bent his face toward her.

He stared at her, wondering at her power over him, wondering at her delicate arms, the soft skin. When she kissed him, Jo Hawkes believed then—and he always believed—that it was a kiss proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that she loved him. But when she slipped back she had his six-gun.

He made no attempt to rush toward her. He was too dumfounded for that. As a matter of fact he had let her have his gun many a time. He had taught her the use of it, and described to her with great fervor and a boyish pride some of his exploits with it.

But here was a different situation. She had virtually accused him of murdering Tom Jimson—she had kissed him, and in that gesture, which so captivated him, she had frisked him of his gun!

He had no time to think. She immediately turned to the half open door of the veranda and called to the sheriff.

"Come on out, chief, and call your men from cover."

VII

JO HAWKES stood on the veranda staring at Chamisal, with blank astonishment and rage. He turned around as if in a daze to see the sheriff's three deputies approaching from different parts of the corral. Every one—Hawkes reflected—had been within easy range. He was carrying on his love scene with that girl under their very feet—it was hideous. A flush went over his long, grim face and vanished, leaving it wet. He looked back at the girl.

His rage turned everything black—except the one point of light—the girl's face. Her eyes still blazed with that strange fire—which he had thought was love. He remembered that kiss—and with an automatic gesture he wiped his mouth.

But the feeling of the kiss remained. And the conviction that it was honest remained. He could not bring himself to believe that he had been tricked. She was incapable of so despicable an act. A Judas might have perpetrated it; a man might have; some kinds of women which you find at the Rex cantina did it often. But this girl could not.

He heard the sheriff's voice—as if it had come from a great distance—from off there across the mesas on the edge of the earth.

"You look like you wanted explanations, Hawkes. Well, I ain't goin' to mystify you. Nothin' gained. You're under arrest for the murder of Tom Jimson."

The horse doctor, the barkeep, and Cobb's Coulee barber came up to the veranda.

"Have you anything to say—afore we take you to the hoosegow?"

"Say about what?" Hawkes asked, looking back at the girl.

"About the murder of Tom Jimson. Are you deaf?"

He seemed to be "deef"—there was no doubt about that. He still stared at Nellie West in utter bewilderment. Jo Hawkes was knocked out—that was all there was to it.

"The sutler from the outfittin' post at Chloride told us all about what happened that night."

This seemed to bring Hawkes to—like a sponge of cold water dousing his face. He blinked as if trying to see who it was that was speaking to him.

"You said what, chief—about the night at Chloride?"

"We've heard the whole story. You was seen totin' your pard's carcass off into a gulch somewheres—then, a little later, you come and ax for his hoss, and threaten the sutler to keep mum."

Jo thought awhile. The sound of the old horse doctor wheezing, and the blowflies in the corral, the squeaking of the windmill—these were the undercurrents to that silence as Hawkes's captors waited for him to speak.

"The sutler saw me—taking the carcass—"

"I reckon I'll take his word, too," Chamisal said. "He's got good eyes, and a good leanin' toward the truth."

"Yes, I won't deny that," Jo Hawkes agreed.

This seemed to nettle Chamisal. The other three looked to their chief and back to the prisoner.

"You ain't denyin' nothin'?" the horse doctor asked. Hawkes cast a glance at him. The little grizzled vet was beneath serious notice. He looked back at the sheriff—and again the blowflies were heard for an eternity of waiting.

Chamisal gave evidence of disappoint-

ment. He had expected Hawkes to make some sort of a denial.

"Look here, *hombre*," he said. "I'd admire to have you make a statement right here and now. Just what did happen at the sutler's store that night?"

"The sutler told you everything, I thought, chief?"

Chamisal swore. "Let that go. I want it from you."

"You said the sutler was a truthful man," Jo reminded him. They were all put on the defense now. He had cooled off. Perhaps it was the coolness, the suavity of utter disgust for life. The girl had tricked him. What mattered now?

"I'm givin' you a chance, Hawkes," Chamisal rejoined pleadingly. "This ain't no lynch mob. You kin at least deny what the sutler said—or else, in keepin' silent, admit it's the truth."

"The sutler spoke the truth," Hawkes said quietly.

This was another disconcerting bomb. Chamisal and his three deputies were at a loss.

"You mean that you killed Tom Jimson?" Chamisal asked.

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind."

"Then what happened to him?"

"He went down to Rawhide to Jack Cactus—a blanket weaver—"

"Oh, yes, I heard you tell the gal that," the sheriff interrupted. "And I happen to know it's a lie. I was in Rawhide myself a couple of days ago—and I heard that Jack Cactus went up to Tucson for to sell his stuff. Been gone a week."

"All right, then, he changed his plans. Said if he couldn't find the blanket weaver he'd head for the Papago pueblo at Soda Mesa."

"If he'd headed thataway, why didn't he stop at this ranch—for to see his gal?" Chamisal asked shrewdly. "It's on the trail."

"I'm not a fortune teller; I know nothing about love affairs."

"It don't seem like it," the horse doctor commented, thinking, no doubt, of how Jo had been roped and hog-tied in his little love scene with Nellie West.

Hawkes flushed darkly. He looked to his horse, but realizing that he would not be permitted to go until the sheriff gave him leave, he announced heatedly:

"To end this palaver, I'll tell you you

can get nothing more from me, chief. What's your next move?"

"To arrest you for murder."

"I'm already arrested."

"To take you to Cobb's Coulee for trial."

"How can you try me for murder without first finding the body of Tom Jimson?"

"That's right, chief," the old horse doctor said. "We got to git a *corpus delicti*."

"If he thinks he's goin' to get free because he hid the body somewheres, he ain't got much savvy concernin' Western justice," said the barber.

"He's right about the corpse," Chamisal said. "But Western justice kin take its course, just the same. Gents, to make a long story short, I'll just withdraw. You know what that means."

"You mean you're turning me over to these three gunmen of yours?" Hawkes asked.

"I ain't turnin' you over to nobody. I'm just leavin' you where you're already at. If you want my protection you'll tell me more about how come you was carryin' Jimson's body away—after there bein' gun-shootin'. And likewise give some sensible explanation as to Jimson's present whereabouts, if any."

"All right, chief; I guess I won't figure on your protection, then."

"You better think twice, young feller."

Hawkes looked at the girl. Then he announced: "I've thought twice."

"Throwin' your life away just because of this little disappointment," Chamisal said in a not unkindly way. "I'm not ag'in' you till you're proved the murderer, Hawkes, remember that. But it seems like you're pretty well set on proving yourself guilty."

"Good-by, chief," Hawkes said calmly.

Sheriff Chamisal swore volubly. His men looked at him. Doubtless it flashed through their minds that this was a very ugly situation. Their chief was going to withdraw and leave it to them to do the lawless thing. It was, in their minds, fair and condonable. But, nevertheless, it was not by any means a pleasant outlook. Chamisal relieved their tortured feelings.

"You've called my bluff, Hawkes. I'll take you to jail. That's the least I can do. Whatever damn legalities there are which will let you off because you've stowed Jimson's body away in some gully I don't know. It may help. But, as the barber

said, they's such a thing as Western justice. The jail at Cobb's Coulee ain't a very strong jail. It's hard to break out of, but a mob kin get in—without no earthquake to help 'em."

"You aren't going to take him to Cobb's Coulee, chief," the girl said in a peculiarly soft voice.

Chamisal raised his protruding gray brows in momentary surprise. Then he laughed. "You stay out of this, gal. You've done your little bit."

"Yes, but I haven't finished it," Nellie replied.

"Look out, chief!" the barber cried.

Chamisal whirled around. He found a gun muzzle leveled at him. Behind it was a slender, freckled hand holding the butt. The sheriff's three cronies, who were all on the same side of the piazza, responded to the girl's quiet command and raised their hands.

"Stick yours up, too, chief," she said. "This is a pretty clean gun. He taught me to use it."

"Well, I'll be a son of two jackasses!" Chamisal exploded.

He didn't raise his hands. But he was wise enough not to step toward the girl.

"All right, Jo," she said to Hawkes. "Take their irons away from them. I'll have the wrangler saddle you our fastest bronc, and you can go."

VIII

THAT night Nellie West rode down to Cobb's Coulee. It was impossible, needless to say, to wait at the lonely Box W for news. She had sent her ranch foreman to town to learn what he could of the outcome of the man hunt. But, unable to endure the deadly suspense, Nellie saddled her snuff brown pony and rode down herself to the sheriff's office.

Sheriff Chamisal—as she herself knew—was already several hours on the Coyotero trail. But a crowd had gathered there, discussing the many sides of this absorbing incident.

They did not notice Nellie at first. To many of them she was a stranger, for she never came to Cobb's Coulee on Saturday nights. None of the ranch women did. It was a time for cowboys to spend their earnings, a time for carousal and gambling and dancing in the cantinas.

Pulling her little sombrero down low over her forehead, she elbowed her way

through the crowd, and paused at the door of the office.

A placard lit by a hanging jack lantern had just been pasted there alongside of a frayed, dog-eared notice.

The latter had been on the door for months, announcing the fact that a thousand dollars reward would be offered for the capture, dead or alive, of a bandit known as Centerfire Sam. Miners and herders had been on the lookout for this Centerfire Sam for a long time.

Those herders who had thrown up line camps to keep their cows from drifting too far into the Coyotero Desert had arrested this Mexican or that, in the hope that he might be the cattle thief the sheriff wanted. But as yet Centerfire Sam had kept himself safely hidden in the maze of arroyos and gulches and sierras of the Coyotero.

And now a new placard was tacked up on the door of the sheriff's office. A new killer was to be searched for by muckers, or pocket-hunters, or wanderers in those bad-lands.

His name—according to the announcement—was

JO HAWKES, CHEMIST

Wanted, for the Murder of Tom Jimson

A description of the escaped killer followed:

Six feet three, blue-gray eyes, close cropped hair, long nose with hook in middle of same. White teeth, which he shows them when grinnin' at you. Long, bony fingers. Same kind of hands as Hank Pinchin's, the two-gun man, who was hung a couple yrs. back. Same kind of eyes as the Wells Fargo bandit, Tim Hanford. Same kind of . . .

The girl did not read on. She found that her suitor—the man whom she had fallen in love with at the climax of this tragic series of events—was now cast into the company of all criminals. His name was set up alongside the name of Centerfire Sam. His lineaments were likened to those of the notorious Pinchin and the murderous road agent, Hanford.

There were four of them now: Hanford, Pinchin, Centerfire Sam, and Jo Hawkes—four who would go down in Cobb's Coulee history as dread killers. Two had been hanged—lynched by the citizenry of Cobb's Coulee. Sheriff Chamisal had a hard time with his prisoners. If the slightest word leaked out that a trial might delay justice—then the lynch law did its work. It

proved to be, in many cases, a just law. It had lessened the rustling. In other towns, where a cattle thief had the hope of a trial, big slices were cut in the ranchers' herds. But not in Cobb's Coulee.

As the girl saw this notice she reflected on Cobb's Coulee's past history. A terrific fear for the man she loved gripped her. She asked an old prospector on the steps of the office just how many men had joined the posse.

"They was the barkeep," the other answered, "and the vet and the barber. Hoppin' mad, too, I'll tell you. Seems like they was held up by a gal—the gal this here murder was committed for."

"Only the sheriff and those three?" the girl asked eagerly.

"Hell, no!" cried the prospector. "They was others. I'm a stranger in this town, but I seen a posse of young, rangy-lookin' *hombres* trail out early in the evenin', and I calc'late, judgin' from their eyes, and their set mouths, and their fresh-lookin' bronses, and their sawed off shotguns, that they had some savvy about runnin' down a murder."

"About how many—"

"Oh, I should say a dozen in all, countin' the ole gent with the star the old gossip."

She turned to go. She heard him remark as she slipped into the crowd on the board sidewalk: "Plugged his own pard, too. What do you think of that? And all for a gal! Seems like the gal's on his side—even knowin' that he—"

She heard no more. The old duffer paused, seeing that she turned her back on him. "Must be one of the cantina gals," he said to another bystander. "Could only see her lips—but they sure were cantina lips!"

She had gone down the darker side of the street, but light blazed out of the cantinas, the tamale stands, the penny arcade, the windows of the Grand Frontier Hotel. Some one recognized her. She slipped away, but the news spread like wildfire that the girl of the Box W—over whom all this muss had been made—was in town.

She found refuge in the lobby of the hotel, where she asked the proprietor to send out in search of her foreman. Meanwhile he hid her from the crowd in his private office.

Her foreman came—old Halloway, a tall

frontiersman with two moles, a lantern jaw, and a beard like Abraham Lincoln's.

"They ain't any news, ma'am," he said. "Except that every one says they can't convict Hawkes of murder, bein' they ain't no corpse."

"Then what's the posse hunting him for?" she asked, knowing well enough what the answer to that question was.

"Townsfolk takin' the law into their own hands," he said. "It looks plumb certain that Hawkes is guilty—and they're all satisfied. Cobb's Coulee won't let no technicality like a *corpse delicti* cheat 'em. They're goin' to get Hawkes, I reckon."

"No, they aren't. Not if I can help it."

"How kin you help it, ma'am?" he asked, with a smile.

"I'm going down there to the Coyotero to-night."

"Don't talk loco."

"They're not going to lynch an innocent man. It was my fault—sticking up the sheriff that way. He was going to bring Jo Hawkes to jail—and protect him!"

"It'd of been the same ending, ma'am. Town would of busted in the hoosegow and gotten him. They wouldn't stand for no technicalities freein' a man who'd killed his pard and hid the body."

He saw he was on the wrong track, and hastened to add: "You did right, ma'am, givin' him a little head start. And Saddle Cloud's a good fast bronc."

"I'm going down to the Coyotero anyway—and to-night," she said. "And you're coming with me."

"Look here, ma'am, if a posse of a dozen men are huntin' Jo Hawkes, what chanst do you figure you've got findin' his trail down there in them deep arroyos?"

"I'm not going to hunt Hawkes. I'm going to hunt Tom Jimson."

"Sufferin' tombstones, ma'am—he's the one man you don't want to find. Cain't you understand that as soon as they git a *corpse delicti*, Hawkes can legally be convicted of murder?"

"He's not a corpse!" the girl said. "Or if he is—why, then it was some one else killed him—not Jo Hawkes. And that's what I'm going to settle."

"Too late, ma'am. They'll corner him in some arroyo or other afore another day's up, I reckon."

"Then we'll hit the trail right now," the girl announced. "You go out and get a water pack and another horse."

"Well, I'll be caterwopously damned!" the foreman exclaimed. But he knew that she was past any further reasoning.

With the help of old Foreman Halloway, she got out of the southern edge of town without being detected. She got out, that is to say, without being detected by any of the townsfolk.

But one man, who was not a resident of Cobb's Coulee, saw her galloping her horse past the last saloon on the town's edge. He saw her, in company with the narrow-shouldered, black-bearded Halloway, lead her horse into the pitch blackness of the boulder wash which leads from Cobb's Coulee to the open desert plain.

This man was an important character in the unraveling of the events which had so entangled Tom Hawkes and his pard. He was a Navaho sheepman with the eyes of a buzzard, white hair, and a skin as wrinkled and crosshatched as an alligator hide. His name was Bill Pommelnose, and his squaws and daughters and sons' squaws were adept at cleaning the wool of his sheep with a mole, at dyeing it in splendid colors, at carding, spinning and twisting it, and at weaving it into blankets of strong warp and fine weft.

He was a great friend of Tom Jimson.

By an act of Providence, he came to Cobb's Coulee while the news was spread about that the girl of the Box W was in town. For if he had come a little earlier he might have gone out to the Box W outfit, after getting the necessary drink or two, and thus have missed the girl. As it was, he heard she was in town; and, keeping his eagle eye focused upon the surreptitious and busy actions of Halloway, the foreman, he found the girl.

Halloway, riding a pinto and leading a pack horse, skirted the town and rode into the dry wash to the south. A moment later the Navaho saw the girl emerge from the darkness of the shacks on the town's outskirts, gallop through a space of moonlight, and then disappear into the shadows of the dry wash.

The Navaho followed.

Old Halloway was not long in detecting the fact that he and the girl were being trailed.

"Keep on a goin', ma'am," he said. "I'll drop back and see what this here coyote is snoopin' at our heels for."

The coyote, somewhat to old Halloway's relief, did not drop from his horse and hide

behind a boulder, preparatory to a gun duel. Instead, he lifted his arm and called out:

"Good evening!"

Despite the broad glare of the moon, the foreman could not recognize the rider. "Who are you, *hombre*, and what-all do you mean by trailin' us thisaway?"

"Bill Pommelnose," the other replied. "I have a message for the owner of the Box W—"

"Well, it's lucky for you you've introduced yourself, *hombre*; otherwise I was just goin' to mistake you for a coyote which your name would of been adobe mud instead of Pommelnose."

"Can I palaver with your woman?"

"You cannot. But you kin speak to me."

"I bringum message—here." He showed a letter.

"From who-all is the message?"

"I don't spik English."

"You're a liar. Who sent you to Miss West?"

"No savvy word of English."

"All right, Mr. Breed. Give me the letter, and I'll give it to her."

"I give him to her."

The foreman thought a moment—interspersing his cogitations with oaths which Pommelnose heard, but discounted. Halloway reflected that this Navaho breed must be from Jo Hawkes. Coming so secretly to his mistress, Halloway was reasonably sure the letter must be a bid for help from the hounded Hawkes. Inasmuch as the latter's safety was his mistress's dearest consideration, Halloway concluded that the letter must be given to her without any more palaver.

"Come along then, Mr. Breed," he said. "Give her the letter, and then vamoise. You have no idea how much like a coyote you look, trailin' in and out of the shadows behind us."

There was absolutely no necessity for this warning. The breed delivered the note to Nellie West, and then picked out the darkest *barranca* in sight and galloped his horse into it before either the girl or her foreman could blink an eye. They could not hear the sound of his horse's hoofs on the ground.

He must have found some silt there—which besides deadening the hoofbeats, likewise swallowed up their prints. He vanished as completely and swiftly as an

uneasy ghost into an immensity of jet black shadows.

The girl held the note to the moonlight, squinted, and gasped. Then she lit a match as though the sharp rays, magnified by the glittering quartz of the cliffs around about them, were insufficient.

"I guess we don't have to ride far for what we're looking for," she announced.

"You mean Jimson?"

She nodded. The girl's fears being the foreman's, the latter had a flash of thought concerning the *corpus delicti*. It was the only thing necessary to clinch the case against Jo Hawkes. "Is he alive?" he asked breathlessly.

"Read this."

As he took the note from her, he was impressed with the fingers of the girl, which were like the touch of ice on his leathery hand.

He found the note unsigned, and printed evidently to disguise the hand.

"Go to the altar of the San Jacinta Mission. The corpse is there."

IX

JO HAWKES estimated that his chances of reaching Mexico by a bee line without being seen were ten to one against him. The sheriff would telegraph to Neutral Saddle, a town on the southern end of the Bad Lands through which he had to travel. A posse would spread out and move north to meet the sheriff's gang. The fugitive would be caught between the two.

Another factor served to defeat him: the maze of arroyos and deep gulches made traveling by moonlight extremely hazardous. A miscalculation of a shadow might result in breaking his horse's leg, or else plunging both horse and rider into a jagged ravine.

Sunrise overtook him just as he got out of the Bad Lands. Before him was a limitless stretch of sand dunes and sage plains, across which he could gallop his horse. He would leave a clearly marked trail here—and, likewise, he might be seen from the cliffs of the sierras behind and in front of him.

Nevertheless, he preferred taking this chance to hiding in the Bad Lands until the pursuit was organized. It was a desperate gamble, and—as was the case with most fugitives fleeing Sheriff Chamisal—he lost.

A cloud of dust moved down out of the

sierra in front of him. It was too big to be attributed to a single rider—big enough to indicate a small posse. Unquestionably it was a posse sent out by Chamisal's telegraphing to Neutral Saddle.

He turned westward and, after an hour's fast trailing, found another posse—a larger one—coming onto the plain from the north. This would be Chamisal and his riders from Cobb's Coulee.

They trailed him across the plain as far as the first cañons of the western rim. He saw Chamisal's riders coming—a long line of individual clouds of whitish dust. The two posses were converging as they raced him. They merged into one a mile or so behind, and for another half mile it was a breakneck race for the nearest gulch in the sierra.

Hawkes galloped his horse up the alluvial fan of boulders and sand which came out of the mouth of the gulch. A cleft in the granite, like a gate into the heart of the mesa, invited him. He entered. Cliffs of quartz arose on either side. Above, the sky narrowed to a strip of blue which seemed to retreat farther and farther away as he trailed up into the interior of the mountain.

His horse slowed to a stumbling walk. He breathed it for a moment, wishing that in this rest he could catch a glimpse of his pursuers. But he seemed virtually imprisoned in the bowels of the earth. No cactus or greasewood grew there; no mesquite; no sage rabbits stuck up their jackass ears to hear him pass. It was a wilderness of giant boulders, with cliffs that lifted their granite façades from a deep gash in the solid earth.

Higher up, the draw shallowed to a small cactus-filled gulch on the rim of which there was the pleasant relief of piñon trees. He had no idea he had climbed so high, for it was as hot—yes, hotter—in the cañon bed than it had been on the open desert. It was curious to be in the furnace-like heat of the gulch while just above him, within range of his gun, there was the piñon belt which signified mountain air!

The sight of those piñons made his lungs pant. He realized the air in the bottoms was thick, retaining the heat of many days. His horse was whitened with lather, and heaving painfully. He led it to shade, then examined the cañon walls for a trail to the top.

There were several dry water courses

up which he might climb. But to do this without his horse was as good as suicide. Once he reached the top, what then? The posse would get his horse. They would not need to get Hawkes. A man on foot in the Coyotero would last only a little longer than the water in his flask.

It flashed through his mind that the only recourse left now was to ride back. He had got himself into a trap. He returned to his horse, tightened the cinches which he had loosened to breathe him, and mounted.

It was then that he heard the rhythm of hoofbeats coming up sharp with loud echoes from the gorge.

At the same time a much greater adversary—the sun—appeared in the portion of sky above the cañon rim. Immediately the opposite walls sent back stabs of heat. The bit of shade which Jo Hawkes had found for his horse melted under this combined attack of many rays.

"We'll play this game safe, gents," Sheriff Chamisal observed to the two posses which he had led up into the cañon. "He's a bad *hombre* with a gun. You-all know that. Don't nobody git too close. All as we have to do is to keep him bottled up in there. I know the place."

"So do I," said the horse doctor. "And I regret to inform you that they's a couple mule deer trails leadin' out of the gorge. Which any man kin climb 'em if he's pressed."

"A man kin, so kin a mule deer. But how about a hoss?"

"Who wants his hoss?" the vet replied. "We don't want his hoss. Besides, it ain't his hoss, in the first place. If you go back to town leadin' a hoss from the Box W rancho, as a result of this expedition, you'll sure be a hero forevermore!"

"They ain't any water in this sierra," the barber said, in support of the sheriff's plan. "If that *hombre* wants to climb up them mule trails and wander around on foot, I reckon our work's done afore we have to lift a finger."

The posse considered this a very good trick, although a rather cruel one. To let Hawkes stay there and broil in the sun—and then wander off without a horse—was like burning a prairie dog out of a hole. But this was a man hunt, and the hunted was a despicable cur who had killed his own pard. Likewise he was Jo Hawkes—who was a dangerous man to get too close to.

"Might as well set and wait," they agreed.

"Not all of you," said Chamisal. "Half of you go up to the rim. It 'll take you an hour or so. But if he means to just stay in that gorge and fry up—why, we might as well make use of the time. One man could guard this defile. But bein' it's Jo Hawkes we're guardin', I reckon we might as well ten of us stay here. The other ten hit up to the rim, and keep him from gettin' out thataway—if he gets desperate and wants to try hoofin' it."

The posse divided. Chamisal remained with his half of the men guarding the gorge. They settled down to take it easy in the shade, complacent in the knowledge that Jo Hawkes was burning alive out in the sun.

They ate, they drank, they smoked. They discussed the perfidy and orneriness of this dye chemist from every angle. They regretted the death of that good-looking young coot, his assistant. A boy who could baffle the oldest professional gambler in that whole range by his method of dealing cards; the boy who never used his skill to cheat—for he had never been known to win.

They worked up a venomous hatred for the fugitive. They were itching to get their hands on him; and get the riata about his neck. By four o'clock, when the sun in the gorge was at its hottest, they began to get restless. Although they were in the shade, the air was suffocating.

"Seems like if he's been out in the sun all day—with the light blazin' ag'in' him from them walls," the horse doctor suggested, "we might stand a good chanst firin' at him. It ain't likely he kin see any too clearly by now—if he's alive."

Some of the posse remembered how Jo Hawkes had given a little sharp-shooting exhibition that day when his eyes were as bleary as a drunkard's. They advised waiting, and camping for the night.

Others who wanted to get back to their ranches or diggings advised creeping into the gorge and trying a shot or two.

"Won't do us any harm. We kin stay outen range—"

"Not outen his range!" the barber objected, cautiously.

"You don't have to come!" they retorted. "Leave four or five of us go in, chief, and see where he's at."

The sheriff demurred, but he did not demur strenuously. The sun would set before long—and Hawkes could spend the night as

comfortably as they. Besides this there was a period of darkness which in that cañon would be like pitch between sunset and moonrise.

And Chamisal saw the possibility of Hawkes's making use of that darkness. It would not be pleasant to have him break upon the company suddenly. Chamisal had the disagreeable feeling that six men would be shot down in one volley.

Then there were the *chulo* breeds over on the desert rim. They were always eager for a fight. And worse than this, there were the Papagoes—who were friends of Jo Hawkes. He had worked among them—in his dye “investigations”—for two years. They might perpetrate some trick or other, hearing that he was in danger. It was, in analysis, best to hurry the outcome.

“Three of you gents volunteer and follow me,” he said.

They crawled in—the sheriff and his three men—first on their hands and knees, then on their bellies through the cactus and around the jagged boulders.

The men who were left behind listened breathlessly.

After an interminable silence a rapid succession of gunshots snapped out, and the granite walls threw the sounds back and forth. It seemed unending, each echo multiplying its cause with scarcely a perceptible diminution of sound. The cause was a shot from a revolver; the echo was a prolonged volley from a Gatling gun.

Presently—the listeners had no idea how long—or how many shots had been fired—the sheriff came back. He was helping one of his men.

“Nothing much. Just a crease in the leg,” the wounded one said, as his companions gathered around him.

“Where’s Jud and Hank Bellows, chief?” they asked.

“Hank’s bandagin’ up his arms,” said the sheriff. “The last I seen of him he was feedin’ Jud red-eye.”

“Feedin’ Jud!” they cried. “What happened to Jud?”

“Hit in the shoulder,” the sheriff rejoined calmly.

“You mean he winged three of you!” the barber exclaimed. “Holy smoke! And I reckon one of you birds must of got him. Seems like you fired off a dozen boxes of cartridges.”

“Didn’t come within twenty feet of him, if I know anything,” said Chamisal. “The

hell-bender just stood up and banged away at us. He was groggy, too—with the heat most like. Looks like we’re campin’ here for the night, men.”

“Camp here till he dies, you mean,” the barber declared grimly.

“Looks thataway,” Chamisal acknowledged, taking out a plug of tobacco. “Leastwise I’m glad of one thing. We’ve got good cause now to hang the hell-bender, shootin’ us up thisaway.”

“You mean you doubted having cause before?” one of the old ranchers asked, stupefied.

“Not exactly. But I sure would admire to see that *corpus delicti*!”

His men all swore in disgust. “Better git out then, chief,” said the horse doctor, “and leave us do this lynchin’. Because we’re sure goin’ to lynch him now.”

“Me go? Oh, no, not now. Maybe before, but not now!” Chamisal had observed a very convenient change in the trend of events. “He’s resisted arrest and shot at me—and at my deputies. That means I’ll stay to the finish.”

The finish came the next day about three in the afternoon. Hawkes lay down in the sand behind a boulder during the greater part of the morning, where there was shade. Then the slow burning started again.

He knew perfectly well he would have to give up soon. A man will not willingly die of thirst when water is two hundred yards away. He knew Chamisal was playing an inexorable and unbeatable game.

But he was not exactly dying of thirst. He was dying of heat. It was a different torture. It made him see red. It had the effect of a red flag on a bull that is tortured with *benderillas*. It had the effect of a violent and brain-heating poison like jimson weed.

But he clung to his resolve not to give himself up—as a bulldog will cling to the neck of a victim while a dozen men lash him with whips. What he wanted more than water was relief from that sun. He wanted the shade. He wanted a cold compress over his chest.

He held up his bandanna before his tortured forehead.

The men on the rim saw this pitiable gesture, and sent word down to the sheriff that the end was near.

Some of them were for putting up a flag

of truce, offering him a drink, and letting him go back to his boulder again. But this was howled down as womanish. It would merely prolong his misery.

Others volunteered to go in for another set-to with guns. "He can't fight now," they argued. But this was laughed at as still more ridiculous. He had wounded three out of four yesterday at a miraculous range—and when the cañon bed was shimmering and waving in heat.

"Let well enough alone," said the sheriff. Indeed, Chamisal reflected that if Hawkes died in the process of resisting arrest, it would be much more "legal like" than dying at the end of a lariat without trial. "Leave him be. He'll come out. Every 'possum comes out, sooner or later when you smoke him."

"Looks like this 'possum don't choke over our fire any too pronto," one posseman declared.

They were mistaken. Jo Hawkes was choking. He was lolling about there in the sand, yearning in every cell of his body for those men to come. Why didn't they come? Couldn't they see he was dying?

He was too weak to travel that two hundred yards of cañon bed to the shade. They would have to come to him.

A particularly vicious ray of concentrated light from the quartz cliffs searched him out. It was like a dagger prodding him. He got up and staggered to his horse, which had been lying on the ground.

Those who saw him could not for the life of them guess what he was about now. They watched him. Was he giving up? It looked as if that horse was done for. And certainly the man was too weak to mount it, even if it could stand on its feet.

He fumbled for awhile with the hackamore with which he had tethered his mount to keep it from joining the horses in the narrow gorge. He was untying it from a yucca tree.

The horse rolled over, kicked, scrambled to its feet, and stood as if devoid of all consciousness of existence, of pain, of the presence of its master. Presently it felt a tap on its croup. It sheered off. The man fell to the ground.

"Damned if he ain't letting his horse go!" they cried. The mount walked off, shambling in the hot sun, in search of shade. The smell of the other horses led him to the gorge. In another moment he had joined the sheriff's group.

The end, as far as Chamisal or any of his men could imagine, had come.

X

A NARROW-SHOULDERED, black-bearded rider and a pale, anxious-faced girl drew up their horses at the entrance to the San Jacinta Mission.

The ruined Franciscan chapel was now overgrown with mesquite. The adobe arches were broken down, and the chapel door was stopped by a bush of palo-verde and a pile of tiles and sand.

It was just before sunset, and the yellow adobe of the façade sent out successive vibrations of heat which gave the old foreman and the girl the impression that a malignant breath coming from the interior of the ruins was puffed out to repel them. The girl was the first—in her eagerness to see the body of Tom Jimson—to dismount and climb up the dump of tiles.

But, reaching the *portales* and catching a whiff of its musty breath, she put her hands to her face, as if shielding it, and exclaimed:

"I can't! It's too horrible. If it's the body of Tom Jimson, you've got to see it. Not me. I can't do it!"

"You stay out here, ma'am," Foreman Halloway said, his thin, mole-dotted face grim and expectant. "You've got to watch the nags—cain't tell but that they's renegade Papagoes hangin' about. And they sure would admire to find a couple of good cayuses with hand-tooled saddles."

He went in, crawling through the hole which had already been torn through the palo-verde.

For an eternity the girl waited. The sky turned a lurid red. The vibrations of heat subsided, and the stark universe of sand mounds and rock mesas changed—not only in color but in texture. They had softened. The world was beautiful in pastel reds and yellows and mauves. The evening star had come in the full glare of the sunset.

The girl was thinking of Tom Jimson now, and sadness enveloped her. She might have wept if it had not been for the nerve-racking excitement of waiting. He had been a good sport—that young fellow Jimson. She knew his reputation for always losing at cards and always going back for another licking.

It was said he could have outwitted the slyest gambler in Cobb's Coulee—if he had stooped to use the miraculous skill of his

fingers. He knew tricks that the Mexicans accounted the works of a witch doctor or a devil. He knew every card in a deck, of all the standard issues—by a glance at their backs.

He never played stud, because it was too easy to ascertain that one unturned card. Draw poker was different, and his fame as an honest player was so widespread that a man would play with him, knowing that Tom Jimson—if he so desired—could read the hand as it was dealt.

Professional gamblers said that one of these days Jimson would sit in a game where herds of cattle and claims to gold mines were put up, and for the first time in his life clean everybody out. They pointed out that he never lost very much at a time. In one real game of drunken prospectors or cattle kings he could win ten times more than he had lost during the last two years. The professionals, in a word, would not play with him. But the reason was plain; they were afraid of that three-edged stiletto of his.

Foreman Halloway interrupted the girl's train of thought. He called out from the dark chapel; his voice, high-pitched and excited, was thrown back from the adobe walls.

"Come in here, ma'am! Come in! I got somethin' to show you! Cain't understand! Come in, quick!"

Despite the fact that she was startled at the unnatural tone of his voice, she climbed through the cactus-filled opening. The foreman's lantern was a dim red spark miles away in the darkness. He had gone far into the depths of the arches, and his dwindled form gave the girl the impression of looking through the wrong end of a telescope.

She passed through a close layer of air and entered—as if going into another chamber—a region of damp cold.

"Did you find him?" she called. The sound of her voice thrown back to her frightened her. She might have whispered, and he would have heard.

"I did," he said softly. "But you come here."

She groped along, guiding herself by that speck of light. Her eyes dilated now, and she saw the grotesque form of old Halloway standing out sharply etched against a red glow.

The cleanly cut features of Tom Jimson were evoked in her memory. It tortured every fiber of her being to go and look at

that body. He was a fine-looking specimen—in life. How horrible it would be to look at that face now!

And there was another reason why she revolted from that sight: to find Tom Jimson's body was to find the only missing link in the chain of evidence against Jo Hawkes.

She steeled herself, and, with her heart thumping, went toward that hideous spot of light. It was hotter there around the oil lantern, and the beams cast out by it seemed lost in an infinity of darkness. The circle of light was a little world far removed in time and space from the real world outside the walls.

Old Halloway was kneeling down now, searching the clothes of the man lying there. The lantern by his foot threw the old foreman's black beard and his moles into sharp relief. He was like a cartoon of Lincoln made in charcoal. The light was kinder to the other face: it was on a level with it and illuminated one side of it with a warm flush as of life.

A gasp of amazement came from Nellie West's lips—a gasp that was partly a thankful prayer. Her eyes stared, incredulous, glowing in wonder.

She was looking not at the face of young Jimson, but that of a stranger!

"Who is it, Hal?" she whispered eagerly.

"I'll be damned if I know. Never seen him. Total stranger. The consarnedest, cussingest mystery as ever come into my life!"

"But why was there a note telling us—to come here—and to find this?"

"That's what's worryin' me sick. Looks like some renegades are goin' to plant somethin' on us! That's what! This here *hom-bre* is a bandit."

"How do you figure that?"

"Don't know. Just guessin'. But he's a rustler, anyways. Look at this which I found in his pocket." He held up a bit of twisted wire—an improvised brand. "He's a brand-blotcher, anyways."

The girl stared some more. The placidity of the stranger's face impressed her. "Is he dead?" she asked suddenly. "Looks as if he's only sleeping."

"He's dead, all right. One touch of him tells you that. But what I can't figure is how he come to die. Ain't any bullet wounds in his clothes." He was examining the clothes as he spoke. "They's a tear in this here deerskin vest—like a tiny knife

went into his heart." He unbuttoned the vest and the black woolen shirt under it. In the breast of the man he saw a tiny wound.

It looked as if three small knife blades had pierced the same spot, their thin red scars radiating from a central point.

Nellie West and the old foreman stared at it under the light of the jack lantern. The sound of their breathing was enormously exaggerated in that deathlike stillness.

Finally old Halloway looked up into the girl's face as she peered shudderingly across his shoulder.

"I reckon you know whose weapon did that, ma'am," he said quietly. "*Tom Jimson's killed this man!*"

XI

At the arroyo where Jo Hawkes had held off his pursuers, Chamisal's two posses were counting the hours of the siege, laying bets, quarreling, calling one another cowards.

"The *hombre's* daid!" they severally kept saying. "Ain't moved for three hours. Fainted. Gave us his cayuse as a token that he was through. And here we are afraid to go in and challenge him!"

"I've had enough of it," said an old rancher. "This here waitin' for a man to die in a hole is the measliest way to run a man hunt I ever did see! I've got work to do at my outfit. And I'm goin' to bust in thar and call for a show-down, chief's orders irrespictive."

Another added: "This here is a lynch party, anyways, chief, and you ain't in a position to give us orders."

Half of the posse had been waiting eagerly for some one to make this suggestion. The sheriff—when all was said and done—should have nothing to do with the affair. The fugitive was to be hanged as soon as caught—every man knew that. Well, then, what was the sheriff doing there? It was not a sheriff's business.

"All right, men," Chamisal agreed. "I been slowly revolv'in in my mind around that same conclusion. I kept you out of that thar gulch because I knew Jo Hawkes could beat you in a gun duel. He's proved that—the last time we tried to attact him. But, as you say, this is goin' to be a lynch party, and I don't, rightly speakin', belong to the same."

The men stood up, felt of their holster flaps, knocked out their pipes, and tucked

plugs of tobacco in their cheeks. It was as if the old rancher who had called for a show-down had blown a bugle call, and the little army was falling in.

"But they's one specification I'll make afore resignin' my authority," the sheriff announced. "*I'm goin' in first!*"

That was like Chamisal. The men looked at each other, then at the wiry, grizzled sheriff. "Ain't much sense to that, chief," one said. "You'll be the first he wants to plug, anyways."

"Not exactly," Chamisal replied. He had thought over the whole situation for many hours and from all angles. He was something of a psychologist. But he admitted that Jo Hawkes had him worried. What was the sense of a man just drying there—like a slug in the sun?

Why didn't he beg for mercy? Why didn't he come out and fall on his knees and plead his innocence? That might be a losing game, but it was a better game than the one he was fighting. He seemed to prefer torturing himself—inviting a certain but lingering death.

"I'm goin' in and see if he's got any fight left," Chamisal said. "It 'll maybe save four or five lives. I feel kind of responsible for you men—bein' I recruited you. Resignin' from bein' chief don't lessen that responsibility."

"All right, chief," the old and cautious horse doctor agreed. "Your ways are the wisest ways. We'll leave you make this last move. I'm plumb certain our man's kicked off by now, anyways. No water—no food—no shade—and most like no sleep. Go on in and find out if he still wants to fight. Reckon you're safe."

"I'll take keer of myself," Chamisal assured his men. "And if I find out he still shows fight—why, then, you men kin carry on the siege anyways you see fit."

He led the way in, preceding his men by a good ten yards. The tiny cañon opened up before them, its farther walls rimmed with red light, as though there were a fire of mesquite brush up there. Lower down, the gray of morning merged the varicolored strata of rocks into a monotone. The scene as observed by the eye was deceptive. It gave the impression of a cool gray dawn, but in reality the bottom of the cañon was close and hot. The thin air of the desert night had failed to cool off those burning slabs of rock.

The cañon bed itself was streaked with

what appeared to be long gray pools of water. The boulders jutted up from these like rocks on a seashore, and a cactus or two was thrust up like the spar of a wrecked ship.

Sheriff Chamisal was scarcely surprised to find that the fugitive was not offering to fire. It was as Chamisal thought—as every man thought: Hawkes must be dead.

The chief grew bold and stood up. He motioned to his men to wait. They grumbled, warning him that he would be shot down if he did not approach more "cautious like." Furthermore, they were not going to hang back and watch him get plugged. But the power of Chamisal's word, as well as an innate fear of Hawkes's sharpshooting, made them obey.

They crouched behind the boulders while the chief stood up rashly, gun in hand. Suddenly he dropped to his knees.

Off there beyond the stretches of gray mirage appeared a tall peaked sombrero. A low voice—distinct in the silence of those precipitous walls—came across the cañon floor.

"Stand up, Chamisal—and put away your gun. I won't shoot."

This brought a general movement from the members of the posse who were backing up the sheriff. The latter waved them back.

With a well-founded conviction that Hawkes wanted a truce, he got to his feet again. He slid his gun into his holster—a gesture which he knew was the safest mode of self-protection.

"Walk over here, Chamisal," the voice came again, soft and labored. "I'm putting up my gun."

Again the posse wanted to come from cover, but their chief—wiser than they—waved them back. He advanced.

He was well within range now of an ordinary marksman. He realized that Hawkes could have dumped him long before this.

"Do you want a palaver, Hawkes?" he asked when within twenty yards.

"I do. Come over here."

"None of your tricks, Hawkes. Remember I've got a dozen men backin' me."

"I'm not afraid of your dozen men—and I'm not playing any tricks, either. Come here."

The sheriff went to the boulder. The gray, bony face of Jo Hawkes peered under the rim of his two-gallon hat. There was no speck of color to those eyes—or

to the face—except for the inflamed and swollen lips.

"If you take me, sheriff," Hawkes said, "will you take me to trial?"

"You had that chanst up there at the Box W," the other replied. "And you didn't take it. How come you're expectin' it now?"

"Then you mean—"

"My men will lynch you. I cain't stop 'em now. Unless you show us where the body of Tom Jimson is. If we have that, why, then, we'll give you a trial. But without it we cain't try you."

"I didn't kill Jimson. How can I show you his body?"

"We all believe you did. You was seen totin' his body out of the tradin' shack at Chloride after some shootin'."

"I was not totin' his body, chief."

"You deny that, too?"

"I do."

"Well, I'm sorry, young feller, but it's too late. My men are het up for to murder. They won't listen to no denials now. Besides, you winged three of 'em."

"Because I'm an innocent man protectin' myself against a lynch gang."

"If you could be proved innocent, then I won't hold you blamable for shootin' them three deputies. But it's too late. I'm advisin' you, young feller—as a man much wiser and older than you in the ways of this here country—give yourself up. Don't lie here and burn. You've been through a couple days of hell, I can see by your face. When all as you need is to tell us where the body of Jimson is at. Then you get taken back to Cobb's Coulee for trial."

"All right, chief," the other said, sinking back to the sand again. "Our palaver's over."

"It's goin' to be a powerful hot day," the older man suggested.

"I'll stick it out."

"You won't let 'em take you? You prefer to go back into hell agin?" The sheriff shook his head ruefully. "I'm sorry for you, boy. One word from you—tellin' us where Jimson is at, and you get your trial."

"Go back and tell your men I'm still fighting. Got lots of ammunition. Don't let 'em come any closer than they are, or I'll throw on 'em."

"You won't stick it out another day."

"I won't be lynched, either," Hawkes declared.

Sheriff Chamisal turned his back on the

pitiable picture. The haggard gray face with the inflamed lips stuck in his mind. He had not taken three steps—his back toward Hawkes—before he put his hand to his hips.

His men off there at the gateway of the cañon saw the gesture, and expected him to draw and wheel upon the prisoner.

But that was not what happened. Chamisal was thinking of those swollen red lips—and of the courage of that man who preferred to stick out another day of hell's fire to giving himself up.

Perhaps, after all, the poor beggar did not know where the body of Tom Jimson was! What a grim tragedy if he did not! At any rate, Chamisal was through with the siege. He went back to his men. And they did not know why he had reached to his hip.

Jo Hawkes knew. For he saw a flask of whisky lying on the sand.

XII

CHAMISAL returned to his eager men.

"All right, gents," he said. "It's beyond the law now. He won't tell where the body is. So I guess all as is left is for you hot-headed killers to take the law in your own hands. But I advise you not to get in thar too close. He won't just wing you this time. He seems to have the hunch that he's got a right to shoot to kill now—in his own de-fense."

The men were satisfied. Old Chamisal could go, and the law could go with him. But the unwritten law of Cobb's Coulee would remain to take its course.

As he mounted his horse and started down the steep trail a familiar sound drifted up toward him. The members of the posse looked down the narrow gorge, startled. It was the rapid beating of hoofs upon the dry wash.

Their first thought was of Papago renegades. Perhaps Hawkes had been waiting for this very eventuality—with the confident hope that if he could stick it out long enough some of his Indian friends would rescue him.

Rescue had come, yes. But it did not come in the shape of Papagoes. It came incarnated in a thin, black-bearded old man and the girl of the Box W ranch.

The two riders were covered with alkali dust, their horses exhausted and lathered. It had been no great trouble to pick up the trail of the two posses. On the way

south they had met a small group of Chamisal's deputies returning home with three wounded men. These were the men who had attempted to enter the gorge that first day.

The girl learned from this band of riders just what was happening. Hawkes—imprisoned in the cañon—had held off twenty men. "But we figure he's kicked in by now," one of the men said.

From then on till they came to the cañon the girl and her foreman had done some pretty fast trailing, as the condition of their mounts indicated.

"Have you caught him yet, chief?" she cried, riding her pony up the rock wash. "Have you hurt him? Have you done this hideous thing—lynched an innocent man?"

"We ain't caught him," Chamisal called out, going to her. "So calm yourself and speak coherent. We'll let you see Hawkes when you specify why you come horsin' into this game."

"He's innocent. I've found proof. I've found the proof that you've all wanted—the body!"

Sheriff Chamisal and his men gathered around. "The body of Jimson—well, that's all as we need." Chamisal breathed a sigh of tremendous relief. Anything to extricate that prisoner from another day of torment. "I reckon he'll come out now and leave me take him back for trial—and you, gents, will likewise consent."

"But it isn't Jimson's body!" the girl cried, dismounting. "It's the body of some rustler. I don't know him. My foreman here doesn't know him. But he was killed by Tom Jimson. Hawkes is innocent. Where is he—let me go to him."

"Hold on now," the sheriff said. "Hawkes ain't proved innocent yet, by a long shot! When you prove it—then I'll let you go to him."

"I've figured the whole thing out," Nellie West declared, excitedly. "Hawkes has nothing to do with this murder. It was his pard who killed a man—and then fled. *Hawkes has been protecting him all this while by keeping his mouth closed!*"

"That don't clear nothin' up. How about Hawkes carrying a body off from the sutler's cabin that night at Chloride?"

"It was the body of this rustler," old Holloway, the foreman, put in. "Which same was in the cabin that night—playin' poker. They must of been a scrap, because Jimson—he killed him."

"How do you know it was Jimson?" the sheriff—backed up by other voices—asked.

"Because he was killed by a three-edged knife!" the foreman announced. "I seen the wound. And the carcass is up there at the San Jacinta Mission, near Chloride—you gents kin ride there if you want and see for yourselves."

This was like a bomb. It stopped all questions. It stopped all action, all voices. The deputies looked at one another in dumb distraction for a few moments. Then:

"You seen the wound. A three-cornered knife? Yes, that was Tom Jimson's work, all righto. Must of been a dispute of some kind. And Hawkes—well, how come he was takin' away that air body? The sutler seen it. I believe the sutler."

"So do we!" the girl said. "I can see it all now. Jo Hawkes was helping his young pard out. That's clear. He hid the body in the San Jacinta Mission, while his pard was escaping to Mexico. Jimson took the murdered man's horse—which is what threw every one off the scene. The sutler thought the stranger had rode away—and no one ever gave him another thought."

"Why didn't Tom Jimson take his own hoss—if he was ridin' as far as Mexico?" the sheriff asked pointedly. "He thought a lot of that hoss, from what I've heard."

"That's just it!" the girl rejoined. "The horse was too sick for such a long journey."

"Sick?" the old horse doctor repeated. He was a skeptical man—and a man who searched bitterly for the truth and nothing but the truth. He scratched his chin, and thrust the tobacco cud into the other side of his mouth—a sure sign of misbelief. Then he thrust it back again to the original side—a sign that might be taken not so much as misbelief as honest doubt.

"Hootch-la!" he cried suddenly, his whole face lighting up. The truth had dawned. The skeptic was converted. The heavens and the earth were transformed! "I remember that young coot bringing his hoss to me a week or so back," he announced to the whole crowd. "And I told him he better go easy in the desert with that cayuse of hisn!"

"Well, damn me if your story don't seem to be holdin' water, all right—thus far!" the sheriff admitted to the girl. "But how come Jo Hawkes has turned hisself into a regular hell-bendin', murderous outlaw over nothin'?"

"Can't you see he was protecting his pard?" the girl demanded frantically. "Are you all blind? He wouldn't tell where that body was—because it would show that his pard was guilty!"

"Well, I'll be damned for a row of tombstones," Chamisal exclaimed, "if that ain't just what's happened! Hawkes has been hangin' on like grim death, boilin' away in thar, and keepin' us all busy with this siege, so's his pard would have time to give us the slip!"

The oaths of anger from the deputies gave way to exclamations of an entirely different tenor. It was hard to interpret just what emotion seemed to have gripped every man there. But it seemed less like anger, and more like admiration.

Hawkes had given an exhibition of grit that was more appealing to the minds of those stern-faced, hot-headed Westerners than his marksmanship. To save his pard, he had virtually been through two days of hell.

"Go in there, gal, and take some water with you!" the old horse doctor said.

"And some red-eye," the barkeep added.

"He's got a full flask," said the sheriff, "leastwise he had a few minutes ago. And tell him he kin come out and git his horse," he concluded, "and they ain't a man here who'll do him hurt."

The girl was gone.

They followed, and saw her a moment later in the middle of the cañon, kneeling beside her lover. She had put his head in her lap—and was bathing his face and lips with water.

XIII

THE events that completed the history of that murder in the sutler's cabin came swiftly. The sheriff and his posse promised to free Jo Hawkes, provided that the girl's tale was true. They repaired to the San Jacinta Mission to get the desired proof. The body of the murdered rustler was then identified by several members of the posse.

Jo Hawkes was freed, and old Holloway, foreman of the Box W, took him, in company with the girl, to Cobb's Coulee, where he was received as a hero. A banquet at the Rex cantina was given in his honor, and there was an old-time dance.

The miners, who were enjoying bonanza times, gave him gifts; a cattle baron gave him a thoroughbred pony; the Last Chance gaming house gave him a silver-studded

bridle. The banjo player of Jonlee's Bar wrote a ballad about him, which was the song hit of the town.

The incident might have ended there. But there were two complications: Jo refused to take the greatest gift of all, which was offered by the girl of the Box W—that is to say, her own hand. He refused, because, obviously enough, it would be taking advantage of his absent pard—who had outlawed himself.

"When Tom Jimson comes back and can fight that fight again, we'll settle this argument once and for all," said Hawkes.

Jimson came back in due time. And it was in this wise:

He came back to the sheriff's office one morning and asked to see old Chamisal.

"I reckon you are surprised to see me, chief," he said with a grin.

"Not exactly," the sheriff declared. "Thought you was in Mexico at first. But then the gal said you wasn't. She said you sent her a message a short while back, tellin' her where she could find the corpse of this *hombre* Centerfire Sam."

"How did she know I sent the message?"

"Well, it was either you or Hawkes. And she said Hawkes didn't send it—because if he did it would of betrayed the fact that you committed the murder. Therefore, it's plain to be seen—you sent the message."

"Well, her deductions are right—and so are yours, chief," Tom Jimson said. "I sent it. I heard, when I was headin' like a bat out of hell for Mexico, that my pard was in trouble. I rode back—told an old sheepman to take her the information. I knew she'd do the rest."

"And she sure did. But what I'd like to know is how come you killed that *hombre*, and how come you lit out for Mexico, thinkin' it such a crime, when what you killed was the orneriest bandit ever thrown a gun in these parts."

"Well, I'll tell you, chief. In the first place I didn't know until to-day he was a bandit. As soon as I found it out I decided to come to you and confess. He was an agreeable sort of cuss, pretending to be a prospector. Friendliest fellow you ever saw. In fact, he prevented my pard and me from finishing up a scrap which we sure were itching to terminate. The joke of it all is I think either Jo or I would have killed the other if that bandit hadn't stepped in.

"Well, I played with him awhile—he'd already cleaned out my pard—and pretty soon I caught him cheating. It got me so hopping mad that I let fly at him—my knife, you know, right while I was dealing. He tried to shoot me up while he was dying. Missed me.

"Then I cooled off. My pard said I did right, but it ought've been done before witnesses. There we were—two pards and a dead man betwixt us—and nothing to prove but that he had cheated me at cards. I figured first I'd come and tell you about it, but I remembered that Cobb's Coulee is pretty hard on a killer—in particular if they figure he might go free because of some flimsy bit of evidence.

"Well, my evidence was flimsy enough, so I took the wrong fork in the trail, as the saying goes, and resolved to hit out for Mexico. My pard said he'd hide the body, and take care of my horse, which wasn't fit for the journey. I took the bandit's horse—so's to cover up my tracks."

"Pretty slick—and likewise pretty wise of you to take the wrong fork," Chamisal said. "I've just had a hell of a time with a bunch of townsfolk who wanted to perpetrate a lynching—as you've no doubt heard. But now that we've seen the body, and identified same as Centerfire Sam, why, you're e-lected for to receive a reward of one thousand pesos. Which same I'll now hand over to you."

The other complication mentioned above was disposed of very simply. Tom Jimson and Nellie West, after celebrating the reunion, got together in some sort of a confab. Hawkes never knew what the result of it was. But Jimson at least had found out that the girl was in love with Hawkes, and that Hawkes still stuck by his original agreement—that is to say, the result of that unfortunate fist fight, which had terminated in Jimson winning the girl.

Jimson then had a confab with Hawkes in the billiard hall. They then rode to the Box W together, and entered the parlor of the main ranch house.

"We've come to a decision, girl, at last," Tom Jimson said. "I've convinced Jo, here, that our fight wasn't a fair fight—and that it's got to be staged again."

"Another fight!" the girl gasped. "Jo can't fight now—not after his experience in that gulch."

"I know it! I've figured on that!" Jim-

son agreed. "We're going to make it cards instead of fists."

The girl said nothing. She was going to point out that cards or fists or six-guns would decide nothing. She herself had decided that Jo Hawkes was the man she loved. But she could not very well continue in this attitude since Hawkes insisted on giving his pard an equal chance. If Tom Jimson won again—well, then, the girl would refuse him—and that was an end to it.

"A plain poker hand," Jo Hawkes decreed.

"I'm satisfied," said the other, taking an old pack from his pocket.

The girl watched, first with the aloofness of a goddess on Olympus looking down upon the frivolities of mortals. Then she watched with the aloofness of a mother smiling on the play of two boys. This latter—it will be admitted—was a less aloof attitude. She then watched with a heart that beat fiercely; then with lips parted.

Tom Jimson had dealt himself a king and three treys, which lay face upward on the table.

Hawkes's four cards consisted of a deuce, four, five, and six.

The girl was quick to observe that if Hawkes were dealt a trey on the final hand, he would win with the straight. She estimated that his chances of receiving a trey were four out of fifty-two—that is to say, if all the treys were in what was left of the pack. But she was quick enough to realize the hopelessness of the chance now, for three of the treys had fallen to Jimson.

Hawkes looked across the table to Jimson. Their eyes did not meet—luckily,

THE END

for Hawkes's eyes were like the eyes of a mad wolf. But his voice was never so calm:

"Reckon here's once—the first time in your life, pard—that you're winning at cards."

"Reckón so," young Jimson said. "I've got three of a kind. And all you can get is a pair."

"Or a straight!" the girl put in.

"That's right. Didn't notice that," said Jimson, still avoiding the eyes of the wolf.

"There's a trey of clubs in that deck," the girl pointed out.

"Yes, but the chances are against him."

"Fifty-two to one!" the girl said.

"Not exactly. There are eight on the table. That makes his chances forty-four to one."

"All right, pard, shoot," Jo Hawkes suggested with a deadly equanimity.

Tom shot out the card. It looked as if he had shot it from the top of the pack. The girl's eyes had been riveted there. So had Jo's. It was uncanny. But there it was.

Thus far in the game, for the first time in his life, Tom Jimson had found the cards going his way; and for the first time in his life he had cheated. The card he had shot out from that pack was a trey!

Jo Hawkes enveloped the girl with a triumphant embrace. She was too much in love to question the integrity of the card dealer. And Hawkes himself knew with the faith of a devotee for a god, that his pard simply *could* not cheat.

It must have been the benign and merciful act of the god of chance who had thus decreed that Nellie West must have the man she loved.

REVERIE

I DREAM of future loves, and pine

For far-off joys I dimly see—

Pleasures I know will not be mine,

Knowing the thinking mind of me.

In vision there falls a tear, a sigh:

New love sings a little while

Its song of wind and flame. Then I

Remember other loves, and smile.

Floyd McKnight